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ABSTRACT

This document contains the fifth volume of "Today's Delinquent," an annual publication of the National Center for Juvenile Justice. This volume deals with the issue of the family and delinquency, examining the impact of parental behavior on the production of delinquent behavior. "Parents: Neglectful and Neglected" (Laurence D. Steinberg) posits the thesis that identifiable behaviors of parents determine precisely when a child will begin violating the law, how serious the crime will be, and how long the behavior will persist. It identifies the parental behaviors that cause delinquency and the societal behaviors that cause parents to be derelict in rearing their children, and proposes a set of interventions tailored to prevent the onset of each identified type of delinquent behavior. "Parenting and Delinquency: Parent Training and Delinquency Prevention" (David P. Farrington) compares and contrasts Steinberg's theses about delinquency causation and control with his own research findings, and questions Steinberg's assumptions about the causes of delinquency. "From Behavioral Science to Social Policy: Look before You Leap" (Arden E. Melzer) responds to Steinberg's theses, criticizing Steinberg's suggestion that 12-month secondary schooling for all children and parent effectiveness training for children and adults will prevent juvenile delinquency. (NB)

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TODAY'S DELINQUENT

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Foreword

We are pleased to present Volume 5 of Today's Delinquent. The subject matter of this issue is parenting and delinquency.

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Preface

This is the second consecutive volume of *Today's Delinquent* to review matters of family and delinquency. The growth and development of youth is such a complex subject it defies simplistic inquiry.

Specifically, this volume examines the impact of parental behavior on the production of delinquent behavior. Laurence Steinberg presents a compelling case for naming parents as the primary culprit in the crimes of their offspring. Moreover, he posits the thesis that identifiable behaviors of parents determine precisely when a child will begin violating the law, how serious the crime will be, and how long the behavior will persist. Having identified the parental behaviors that cause delinquency and the societal behaviors that cause parents to be derelict in rearing their children, Steinberg proposes a set of interventions tailored to prevent the onset of each identified type of delinquent behavior. Early—meaning beginning in grade school and continuing forever—parental education is a pivotal ingredient in all of Steinberg's proposed interventions.

David Farrington compares and contrasts Steinberg's theses about delinquency causation and control with his own research findings, and finds reason to question Steinberg's assumptions about the causes of delinquency. Farrington has been studying a birth cohort of males born in 1953 in London, England. The results of Farrington's research tend to be more supportive of Steinberg's proposals for intervention than they are for his assertions about causation.

Arden Melzer finds Steinberg's arguments persuasively presented but short on logic. Melzer is particularly critical of Steinberg for confusing correlates of delinquent behavior with causes, and then erroneously proceeding to design interventions for causes that don't exist. However, Melzer reserves his strongest criticism for Steinberg's suggestion that twelve-month secondary schooling for all children and a full dose of Parent Effectiveness Training for children and adults alike will prevent juvenile delinquency.

This issue of *Today's Delinquent* presents neither a consensus of scholarly opinion nor conclusive empirical documentation for the role of parents in causing and curing the delinquent behavior of their children. Of course, there was no such expectation of the authors at the outset. However, I was struck by the degree to which the manuscript does crystalize the essence of existing hypotheses about delinquent behavior. Moreover, the means by which we may fruitfully pursue the testing of seminal hypotheses regarding parental causation and control of delinquent behavior are also clearly presented. I, for one, suspect that I will return again and again to this volume in the future when the subject turns to whether the tree really does grow as the twig is bent, and who is it that is really bending all those twigs?

Hunter Hurst

Parents:
Neglectful and Neglected

Laurence D. Steinberg

Research on the family and its role in promoting delinquency presents us with a paradox. On the one hand, there are many, many things we can say with a great deal of certainty. We know exactly what types of families produce delinquents, we know what it is that they do that produces delinquents, and we know why these patterns have the effects that they do.

At the same time, however, we seem unable to translate this very clear and convincing body of knowledge into effective public policy, and this is the paradox. Thus, despite the fact that our knowledge base about delinquency has expanded dramatically during the past 25 years, this increased knowledge actually has been outpaced by increases in delinquency itself. In my mind, therefore, the most interesting question one might raise in a discussion of delinquency and the family is this: **how can people who know so much be so ineffective?**

The extent of our impotence is mind-boggling. Since the late 1950s the rate of juvenile arrests has increased steadily, sometimes at very brisk rates, sometimes more gradually, but virtually always toward higher, not lower, rates of delinquency. You may have read that the delinquency rate leveled off around 1980, but this is an artifact of the diminished size of the adolescent population. Since there were about 3 million fewer young people between the ages of 15 and 19 in 1985 than there were in 1975, there were fewer delinquent adolescents to arrest and, hence, a lower absolute number of juvenile arrests. If we take into account changes in the absolute size of the adolescent population, we find that for males, arrests for violent crime actually increased between 1981 and 1985; for females, arrests for violent crime remained unchanged but arrests for property crime rose; and for both sexes, arrests for vandalism rose substantially (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1986). More to the point: the consistent post-1950 increases in rates of juvenile delinquency took place

during an era when spending on delinquency prevention was really quite substantial.

That is not even the worst of it. When we look at the statistics on the increase over time in juvenile offenses, we find that the greatest increases have been among recidivists, not among first-time offenders (Rutter, 1980). Thus, not only have our policies apparently failed with respect to *prevention*, they also have failed with respect to *intervention*. Most scientific studies of intervention efforts indicate that programs designed to treat juvenile delinquents are not successful—confirming what we see in the statistics on juvenile recidivism. Psychotherapy, as it is conventionally practiced, has no apparent impact on the juvenile offender. Family therapy, as it is usually practiced, is not effective in the treatment of delinquency either. Residential treatment programs occasionally work, but more often than not they fail and, more frustrating, we can't seem to systematically sort out those factors that differentiate successful programs from unsuccessful ones. Diversion programs that lead to the acquisition of vocational or other skills sometimes show positive effects—actually, this approach seems to be the most successful of all—but the costs of processing young people through diversion programs have become prohibitive. This is in part because the appeal of diversion programs is so great that many communities have been shunting large numbers of relatively minor offenders through programs that were initially proposed to help serious offenders (Rutter and Giller, 1983).

Incarceration, of which a growing proportion of the American public apparently approves, certainly keeps young people off the street for a period of time, but the costs of confinement well exceed the costs of going to Harvard for four years, and I imagine that the benefits of the latter most likely outweigh the former (not having spent time either at Harvard or in prison, I am unable to comment further on the relative merits of each institution). Moreover, because the chances of an individual delinquent being apprehended are so small—the estimates range from 1 percent to 10 percent, depending on the violation—effective deterrence is impossible to achieve (Gold and Petronio, 1980). Mandatory sentencing for juveniles, an idea whose time apparently has come ("U.S. Report on Youth Crime," 1986) may be effective in detaining those juveniles whom we manage to arrest, but whether this policy will have a

deterrent impact on young people remains unclear. Personally, I am not optimistic that this form of intervention will be any more effective in reducing rates of deviant behavior among young people than any of the approaches cited above have been.

Juvenile Delinquency in Context

The problem of delinquency is not an isolated affair. I have oriented my remarks around the issue of delinquency, but they apply just as well to issues of adolescent pregnancy, suicide, school failure, and drug and alcohol abuse. Indeed, if one assembles the existing evidence across these five different problem domains—pregnancy, suicide, school failure, substance abuse, and delinquency—one finds remarkably similar patterns over time for each problem area. The overall pattern can be summarized simply.

First, there have been similar increases between 1955 and 1985 in all problem areas (e.g., Steinberg, 1985). And, while there admittedly have been changes in the ways in which these problems are reported and tabulated—changes which may have made the apparent increases seem larger than they genuinely are—most social scientists agree that the widely-publicized increases in the rates of problem behaviors among the young are real and not statistical artifacts. **By virtually any index, the psychological and social health of American youth has worsened appreciably during the last 40 years.**

Second, because the aforementioned indices depend on the existence and recording of very serious problems, they grossly underestimate the genuine prevalence and seriousness of psychosocial disruption among American youth. *Suicide statistics* do not reveal how many adolescents are profoundly or even mildly depressed. *Arrest records* most certainly underestimate the extent of true delinquency and provide only a very small window on less serious juvenile offenses that go largely unreported. When adolescents are asked to report on their drug and alcohol consumption, they, like adults responding to a physician's questions during a check-up, understate the frequency and level of their substance use. *School dropout rates* tell us how many youngsters start but fail to complete high school, but they do not tell us how many

students are physically present in school but psychologically absent from the classroom; nor do they reveal how many youngsters are bored, underachieving, or otherwise disenfranchised from the process of education. *Pregnancy statistics* tell one side of the story, but they do not reveal very much about the ignorance young people have about sex or the tremendous pressure many youngsters feel to engage in activities they feel uncomfortable about. **Psychosocial disruption among young people is probably worse than our official statistics tell us it is.**

Third, while the absolute rates of most of these problems tend to be higher among minority youngsters than among nonminority youth, these problems clearly afflict young people from all walks of life. Two groups that have in the past shown lower rates of problem behavior than other groups—young adolescents and adolescent girls—have shown in recent years the fastest rates of increase in many of these problems.

The data on young adolescents are especially troublesome, for several reasons. First, our data on problem behavior among young adolescents is not very good, because our best epidemiologic studies of representative samples of adolescents come from studies of older high school students (Lipsitz, 1977). Based on anecdotal and clinical evidence, which point to increased pathology and malaise among the young (e.g., Elkind, 1982), there apparently is good reason to believe that our official estimates of problem behavior among young teenagers are underestimates.

Second, there is reason to believe that earlier experience in risk-taking, or just plain risky behaviors—such as unprotected sex or drug and alcohol use—may have more profound and more lasting negative effects on subsequent development than does experience in these same behaviors at a later age (Baumrind, 1986). In other words, **despite the fact that a very large proportion of young people will eventually consume alcohol or have sexual intercourse, it is better, developmentally speaking, if young people do these things for the first time when they are older rather than younger.** Coping strategies, intellectual abilities, and judgment all improve during the adolescent years, and older teenagers are more able than their younger counterparts to draw on these resources to bet-

ter understand their own behavior and that of those around them.

Third—and this is especially true with respect to delinquency—**there is evidence that the earlier the onset of a problem behavior, the more resistant the behavior is to intervention.** This may be because early onset may be a manifestation of a more insidious problem that is difficult to change (e.g., preadolescent substance abuse may reflect more fundamental problems in self-regulation); it may be because early onset itself leads to other problems that reinforce or exacerbate the problem behavior (e.g., preadolescent substance abuse may lead to school problems, which in turn may further the pattern of abuse); or it may simply be that the longer someone has been behaving in a certain way, the more likely it is that the behavior problem will become habitual. In any case, there is good reason to worry about the downward shift in age of onset for problem behaviors among American youngsters. The American high school students of the 1990s are likely to be more troubled than their counterparts today. Even worse, the social trends we are now seeing among families indicate that youngsters who will come of age in the next century will be far more disturbed than youngsters we are seeing today.

As is the case with delinquency, we understand the antecedents of teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, school failure, and suicide fairly well. In this respect, our scientific endeavors have been fruitful. But it is also the case, as it is with delinquency, that these other maladies have been relatively impervious to our well-intentioned attempts at intervention. Thus, I return to a question I raised earlier: how is it that we can *understand* something so well but be so powerless to do anything about it?

The answer, I believe, is that after-the-fact intervention—for the chronic offender, the school dropout, the substance abuser, the sexually careless, or the profoundly depressed—is unfortunately too late in the overwhelming majority of cases.

Now this pronouncement should not be interpreted as pessimistically as it sounds. Actually, I believe that we have reason to be more optimistic than one might otherwise think. **I believe that we must shift our focus—intellectual as well as fiscal—from intervention to prevention.** Moreover, I believe that we have the neces-

sary knowledge required to effect real and lasting reductions in the most significant adolescent problems we are faced with, including juvenile delinquency.

I must stress, however, that a shift away from intervention toward prevention must be accompanied by a fundamental change in our perspective on the problem. We have placed the delinquent and his family under a microscope and have had the power of our instrument set at too high a level. We have been able to see with great precision the intrapsychic conflicts of the young offender, the shape and size of his peer group, and the textures and details of his family environment; but we have been unable to see beyond the limited boundary of our slide. We need to bring our microscope into broader focus, to add to our instrument a wide-angle lens. In order to design an effective program of prevention—one that will affect not just delinquency, but the range of maladies discussed earlier—we must look beyond the individual delinquent, beyond his or her family or peer group, and look instead at the broader context in which families and children develop in contemporary society. **The thrust of my argument is that we will not be able to reduce delinquency—or for that matter, teenage pregnancy, school failure, suicide, or substance abuse—unless we are willing to consider some very dramatic transformations in some of society's most fundamental institutions.**

My argument will take a somewhat circuitous route, for reasons that will become clear as I proceed. First, I shall share some thoughts on a developmental conceptualization of delinquency and how this conceptualization may help us better understand delinquency prevention. Next, I shall discuss family factors and their relation to the development and maintenance of delinquent activity thus conceptualized, including the issue of parental neglect. Finally, in considering some of the ways in which society's institutions evoke and exacerbate patterns of parental neglect, I shall discuss forces outside the family that impinge upon its functioning, make the business of parenting more difficult, and increase the likelihood that children will grow up at risk for trouble. I shall argue that parental neglect is, in most cases, the product of neglected parents.

Let us begin with a developmental look at the delinquent.

Delinquents and *Delinquents*

The term "delinquent" is a very good legal term, but it is a terrible psychological or sociological one. The problem is that there are delinquents and then there are *delinquents*. Because many research studies have failed to differentiate among types of delinquents, they have clouded, rather than clarified, our understanding of the situation. I shall not spend any time debating the pros and cons of various definitions of delinquency, or critiquing the various classification schemes that have been proposed, and ultimately rejected, over the past 50 years. Most of them make at least some sense, but none of them works perfectly. Instead, I will share the way in which a developmental psychologist might look at the findings derived from the best research that has been done on the antecedents of juvenile misbehavior. The scheme I shall propose emphasizes, above all, the age at which misbehavior begins, for this, as we shall see, provides an important window on the underlying causes of the problem. **Indeed, when we juxtapose what is known about delinquency with what is known about normative child and adolescent development, the existing literature on the antecedents of delinquency makes a great deal more sense.**

When we consider side-by-side the literatures on delinquency and on normative development, **we find that there are essentially three types of delinquents: *preadolescent*, *early adolescent*, and *middle adolescent*.** The three types are distinguished by the seriousness of their delinquent acts, by the consistency and frequency with which they violate the law, by their response to getting caught and punished—if that indeed happens—and, most important of all, by the age at which they begin their delinquent behavior (Loeber, 1982). The developmental evidence suggests that the antecedent histories of these three types of delinquents are indeed very different and therefore so must be the strategies necessary to diminish their numbers. Because my interest here is primarily in differences among the groups in the age at which the pattern of misbehavior begins, I shall use this factor to label each of the groups. But please bear in mind, of course, that age at onset is not the *sole* distinguishing characteristic—only the most salient. I will begin with the largest group: the *middle adolescent* delinquent.

A Developmental Perspective on Delinquency

Three Types of Delinquents:

1. Middle Adolescent Onset

- Onset around age 15
- No prior record
- Few repeat offenses
- No personality problems
- Little likelihood of adult crime

2. Early Adolescent Onset

- **Onset** between 12 and 15
- No prior record
- **Frequency** of offenses declines after age 16
- **Overrepresentation** of boys
- Some psychological **immaturity**
- Little likelihood of adult crime

3. Preadolescent Onset

- Onset before age 12
- Frequent offenses
- History of behavior problems
- History of aggression
- Overrepresentation of boys
- Overrepresentation of children from disorganized families
- Likelihood of adult crime
- Generally impervious to treatment

The Middle Adolescent Delinquent

The *middle adolescent* delinquent is found in large numbers in all communities. He or she comes from a prototypically good, as well as a prototypically bad, family and is found at the top of the class as well as the bottom of the barrel. Most likely, this youngster never did anything very terrible during childhood and will in all probability not get into trouble with the law once he or she has reached young adulthood. He or she is probably quite affable, socially poised, and popular at school. Most likely, his or her misbehavior took place around the age of 15. In all probability, the youngster committed just one or two delinquent acts and most likely he or she was never caught. The offense may have been a status offense, it may have been a crime against property, it may have been drug-related, or it may have been a crime against a person. Although it probably was not a crime of extreme violence, nor one of great magnitude, it was not necessarily trivial. If the act was discovered and the issue was handled in an informal, sensitive manner—especially if the outcome of the intervention was to increase his or her parents' vigilance—the teenager probably desisted from further delinquent activity.

Most adults probably have contact with delinquents of this type on a regular basis. We hire them to mow our lawns and baby-sit our children. We wave to them as they walk by our homes on their way to school. They tell us to "have a nice day" when we see them at McDonalds. They seem like perfectly normal American teenagers, and—if by normal we mean average—they are. By all estimates, most American teenagers fall into this category of delinquents, although the story is not found in official crime and delinquency statistics. If, however, we go directly to adolescents themselves, as many researchers have done, we find that over 80 percent of all American adolescents report having committed a chargeable offense at least once (Gold, 1970). For example, in a series of studies on working teenagers that I conducted with my colleague Ellen Greenberger, and described in our book *When Teenagers Work: The Psychological and Social Costs of Adolescent Employment*, we found that about *two-thirds* of all teenagers had done something either delinquent or otherwise deviant at work within *two months on their*

first paid job (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986). The actions ranged from lying about the number of hours on their paychecks to stealing money from their employers. Imagine, then, how much delinquent behavior must go on overall, if we find this much just by barely scratching the surface of a hamburger bun.

When we know that delinquent behavior, thus broadly defined, is so prevalent and widespread, it does not make sense to search for family factors that predict it. If 80 percent of all teenagers admit to occasional delinquency, it simply isn't sensible to argue that delinquency is inevitably the product of bad marriages, family conflict, poverty, or divorce. Obviously, some youngsters who commit delinquent acts do come from these backgrounds. But since we know that 80 percent of all families are not unhappy, conflict-ridden, poor, or broken, it seems reasonable to conclude that at least some adolescents who violate the law grow up in happy, conflict-free, affluent, and intact homes. Clearly, not all delinquency is the product of a poor family life.

Many social scientists and many individuals involved in the judicial system dismiss the fact that over 80 percent of all teenagers commit a chargeable offense at one time or another. They argue—and they are factually correct—that, while the 80 percent figure is indeed true, it is more important to note that *most* delinquent activity is committed by a small proportion of repeat or chronic offenders. According to some estimates, about 15 percent of all young people accounts for more than half of all delinquent activity—and an even smaller proportion accounts for virtually all *serious* delinquent activity (Gold, 1974; Gold and Petronio, 1980). The repeat or chronic offender is, and should be, more of a concern to society than the one-time offender, but in directing our gaze toward the chronic offender we should not close our eyes to the fact that so many otherwise normal adolescents do in fact violate the law at one time or another.

I say this for several reasons. First, a merchant, who has lost money because of adolescent shoplifting, experiences the same economic loss whether the theft was committed by a one-time or by a chronic offender. Thus the widespread nature of delinquent activity among contemporary adolescents is a genuine economic problem for all of us. If the shoplifter is not apprehended, the theft represents a real and measurable loss

to the merchant, and the cost is inevitably passed on to the rest of us as consumers. If the shoplifter is apprehended, this results in added time and paperwork for community and law enforcement officials, and the cost is passed on to the rest of us as taxpayers.

Second, and more important, **that so many young people break the law at one time or another says something significant about the nature of adolescence in contemporary society that should not go unnoticed.** It may be related to the absence of meaningful roles for young people and their disengagement from the social order (e.g., President's Science Advisory Committee, 1973). It may be related to changes in the nature of family life and the consequent alienation of young from old (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). It may inhere in the nature of peer pressure among contemporary youth (Brown et al., 1986). **Whatever the cause or causes, however, one message is very clear: violation of the law, up to a point, is sanctioned by a large number of contemporary teenagers and, while *frequent* delinquent activity thankfully has not become part of the average young person's adolescent experience, *some* delinquent activity is now a part of contemporary youth culture. As we shall see, the fact that today's teenagers thumb their collective nose at many forms of delinquent activity has implications for understanding frequent as well as one-time offenders.**

The Early Adolescent Delinquent

The second group of delinquents resembles the first group prior to early adolescence, but these youth begin to look different during the junior high school years and remain different during most of high school. Let us call them *early adolescent* delinquents. Boys are overrepresented in this group (Gold and Petronio, 1980). Like the *middle adolescent* delinquents, these youngsters are unlikely to have been involved in problem behavior during most of elementary school and are unlikely to have trouble with the law as adults. And like the *middle adolescent* delinquents, these youngsters come from all walks of life. **But unlike the first group of delinquents, these youngsters are more frequent offenders, sometimes more serious offenders, and**

usually younger when they begin their delinquent activity.

As opposed to the first group, whose violations are most likely to occur during high school, in the *early adolescent* group the onset of delinquent behavior is more likely to begin slightly earlier, between the ages of 12 and 15. These youngsters, while average teenagers in most respects, are somewhat different from their peers in certain aspects of social development. They are more likely to be followers than leaders, and they are more likely to become involved relatively earlier than their peers in dating and sexual relationships (Gold and Petronio, 1980). They are, in an important sense, more *peer oriented* than other youngsters, and I believe that their delinquency is best understood as a manifestation of this greater peer orientation. While the first group of delinquents—the *middle adolescent* onset delinquents—are psychosocially average, *early adolescent* delinquents are likely to be somewhat psychosocially immature. This immaturity does not impair their functioning or social relationships, but it is apparent when we compare their scores with those of their peers on standardized tests of psychosocial development. Indeed, findings from our own ongoing study of adolescent family relations indicate that those who seem to be more peer oriented—who give in more easily to peer pressure—score lower on a standardized measure of psychosocial maturity (Steinberg and Silverberg, 1986).

These *early adolescent*, slightly immature youngsters represent a difficult problem for those involved in our judicial system. Because they do not have the background characteristics predictive of long-term criminality—and because, indeed, they are unlikely to develop criminal careers—we may be reluctant to take severe measures against those we apprehend, particularly if these measures will disrupt their home or school life or bring them into extended contact with more dangerous youth. On the other hand, their recidivism commands the community's attention and causes genuine problems for those who are victimized by their exploits. My own view is that *early adolescent* delinquents are best served by interventions that increase parental effectiveness—a topic to which I shall turn at a subsequent juncture of this paper.

The Preadolescent Delinquent

The third group of delinquents is the most troublesome—the *preadolescent* onset delinquents. These youngsters clearly stand apart from their peers and do so at an extremely early age—in some cases, as early as preschool. These youngsters have, from an early age, identifiable problems in the areas of aggression, impulsivity, social skills, and self-regulation (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). They are rated as troublesome and intellectually slow during early elementary school, daring and dishonest during late elementary school, delinquent during junior high school, and criminals as young adults. These youngsters are more likely to come from large, poor, and disorganized families where the adults provide little supervision (Farrington, 1986). Their siblings are more likely to be delinquent as well—indeed, one study of New York City youth during the early 1960s indicated that 75 percent of the city's delinquents came from 1 percent of its families. More recent estimates concerning the concentration of delinquent youngsters within a small number of households, while not quite as dramatic, are nevertheless still striking (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). The fact that chronic offenders run in families is very telling and argues against explanations of delinquency that emphasize factors like youth unemployment or fluctuations in the economy.

In addition to the *preadolescent* onset of problems among these delinquents, they are also distinguished by the chronicity and frequency of their misbehavior and their general resistance to intervention. We might think of them as *psychopathologically* delinquent; it is, of course, possible to change their pattern of behavior, but it is extremely difficult, extremely time-consuming, and extremely costly. As one colleague of mine said when we were discussing this particular group of young people, we can not turn around 15 years of consistent and sustained psychological damage with one hour a week of psychotherapy for a year or two. Attempts to intervene in this population after the age of 13 or so are not likely to succeed. **There is some thought that intervention prior to this age—the earlier the better—may be the most promising route but, because our society has a terrible habit of waiting until a small problem turns into an insurmountable one before stepping**

in and intervening, we are often remiss in identifying predelinquent youngsters before they become delinquent or criminal.

Current thinking indicates that some constitutional factors—either inherited or otherwise acquired very early in life—may play a role in *preadolescent* onset delinquency (Hernnstein, 1983). Factors such as temperamental difficulty, hyperactivity, and deficits in attention have all been implicated (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). But, as is always the case, such predisposing factors in and of themselves do not tell the whole story. Rather, it appears as if *preadolescent* delinquency is more often the product of an interaction between predisposing, constitutional factors in the child and conditions in the home environment. These conditions in the home, which I shall discuss later, are present relatively early in life and lead to the development of a wide range of psychosocial problems that in many cases grow into delinquent and criminal activity.

Families and Delinquencies

Given the fact that there are important differences among these three groups of delinquents, it should come as no surprise to learn that the developmental histories—particularly in the family—of each type of delinquent differ in some very important ways. In other words, although the *specific misbehavior* of a youngster who steals for the first time at the age of 15 and one who steals for the first time at the age of 8 is identical, the *factors* that lead a child to begin to misbehave during elementary school are very different from those that lead an adolescent to misbehave for the first time during high school. Moreover, considering the age of onset as a critical factor gives us a better idea of the developmental antecedents of the behavior. Because most research has not disaggregated the delinquent population before searching for familial antecedents, it has therefore clouded what actually is a reasonably clear picture; that is, **by grouping together all delinquents without heed to each individual's age of onset of delinquent activity, we may have made it impossible to find clear familial predictors—even though such predictors are valid.**

For example, consider the longstanding question of whether delinquents are more or less likely to come

from broken homes. Some studies suggest that they are (e.g., Dornbusch et al., 1985), but others suggest that they are not (e.g., Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). Individuals in the social science community point to scientifically-controlled studies showing no clear relation between family structure and delinquency once socioeconomic status or family conflict is taken into account (e.g., Rutter, 1980). Yet those who have more first-hand experience with juvenile offenders will insist that a disproportionate number come from single-parent households or stepfamilies (e.g., Cohill, 1985). My guess—and it is only a guess—is that both perspectives are accurate. **Overall, when all three types of delinquents are pooled together, we find no relation to family structure. But among the most chronic offenders—that is, the youth whom judges and probation officers have the most contact with—we find a higher percentage of young people from homes where there has been marital disruption.**

As I indicated earlier, I believe that we know enough to advance some very clear propositions about the familial antecedents of delinquency, as long as we recognize that the antecedents vary across the three categories of young people. In other words, **the family—and more specifically, parental neglect—plays a role in cultivating all three categories of delinquents, but it plays a different role for each group.** The propositions I shall advance have not been directly tested—although they certainly are amenable to scientific inquiry—but the circumstantial evidence in support of each one is very persuasive. Briefly put, **the chief familial antecedent of *middle adolescent* delinquency is less-than-adequate parental vigilance (Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984); the chief familial antecedent of *early adolescent* delinquency is long-standing and excessive parental permissiveness (Maccoby and Martin, 1983); and the chief familial antecedent of *preadolescent* delinquency is early disruption in the parent-child relationship (Rutter and Garmezy, 1983).** Obviously, these factors overlap somewhat, but I intend to argue that they form a hierarchy of severity that helps to explain the family's role in delinquency. Thus, while the parental permissiveness associated with *early adolescent* delinquency is often accompanied by insufficient parental monitoring, it is the history of permissiveness, rather than the lack of

Antecedents of Middle Adolescent Onset Delinquency

Minor Delinquency Normative — Peer Pressure High

Parental Attention Elsewhere — Parental Vigilance Low

→ Normative Delinquent Activity

Antecedents of Early Adolescent Onset Delinquency

Early and Excessive Permissiveness — Poor Self-Regulation; Excessive Peer Orientation

→ Susceptibility to Antisocial Peer Pressure

Antecedents of Preadolescent Onset Delinquency

Early Parent-Child Disruption — Weak Parent-Child Attachment

→ Decreased Internalization of Standards; High Levels of Family Aggression; Low Parental Vigilance

vigilance, that is the culprit. By the same token, problems in the parent-child relationship are often accompanied by permissiveness and insufficient monitoring, but it is the first of these factors that leads to *preadolescent* delinquency.

The Family And Middle Adolescent Delinquency: The Absence of Parental Vigilance

My proposition that insufficient parental monitoring is the prime familial factor behind *middle adolescent* delinquency is predicated on something I noted earlier, namely, that some norm violation among American teenagers has become normative. The pressure on teenagers today to go along with the crowd and engage in occasional delinquent activity, including the use of illicit drugs, is so great that it is virtually impossible for the average young person to resist this pressure time and time again. And the fact that, for an individual in this category, no problem behavior of any sort has emerged prior to middle adolescence indicates that the family environment in which the youngster has developed probably has been perfectly adequate—the signs of longstanding fundamental family problems are seen long before middle adolescence. I do not believe that *middle adolescent* delinquents are morally bereft, or psychologically stunted, or malicious, or that they are lacking in character. Rather, I believe that in today's social environment—an environment in which the peer group has come to play an increasingly pervasive role in the lives of young people, both in time and in psychological energy—peer acceptance has become tremendously important, so much so that even some of the most psychologically-healthy youngsters will not be able to withstand pressure from their friends to do things that they know are wrong, undesirable, or dangerous.

There are, of course, many factors that can precipitate the onset of delinquent activity in middle adolescence, among them, transient adjustment problems due to marital discord, stress, or school difficulties. Yet I believe that the most profound causes of this type of delinquent behavior inhere in the nature of contemporary society and, more specifically, in two sets of factors: the values held about the socialization of young people, and the isolation of young people from parents and other adults. I recommend to you Marie Winn's popular book, *Children*

without Childhood (1984). It is hyperbolic in places, but the gist of her argument is well-taken and I believe it informs this discussion, especially as it applies to understanding delinquency among youngsters whose parents appear to be executing their function reasonably well. Winn argues that we have moved in recent decades from a posture of *protection* toward young people (in which we, as adults, feel obligated to protect youngsters from some of the evils or questionables they will encounter as they age) to one of *preparation* (in which we see as benign, or even desirable, the early exposure of young people to experiences previously reserved for those who are older) as a means of preparing them for their own adulthood.

To contrast these two schools of thought in this way makes it difficult to believe that any adult in his or her right mind would endorse the *preparation* view over the *protection* view, but let me assure you that the *preparation* view is widely held and subscribed to. For example, in our studies of teenage employment that I mentioned earlier, **we have found evidence indicating that part-time employment is linked to occupational deviance, and that youngsters turn to drugs and alcohol to mitigate the effects of job stress** (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986). In presenting our findings to various audiences, we have encountered many adults—some of them educators and child psychologists—who believe that these findings are not cause for concern because, after all, the young workers are only learning the lessons of the *real* world. It is, apparently, quite an interesting reality, and it is quite a lesson to teach a 16-year-old.

My contention is that neither of these forces—the shift in values from *protection* to *preparation*, nor the isolation of young from old—has the adverse effect alone that both do when they occur together. In a society that treats young people more benignly, more protectively, it is less essential for young people to be in close daily contact with adults. Alternatively, in a society in which young people have a great deal of contact with their elders, adolescents do not need quite as vigorous protection, because the adults with whom they have contact are able to assist them in processing, understanding, and resisting the forces that encourage dangerous or undesirable behavior. **To put it more concretely, your children are not going to be**

affected by MTV if it isn't available, of course, but they are less likely to absorb the wrong messages from it if you are sitting in the living room with them while they watch it than if they are left to watch it alone. Among other reasons, you may stand up and turn the program off if you disapprove of the content. In contemporary industrialized society, where patterns of family, schooling, and work have continued to isolate young people from physical and psychological contact with their elders, and where youngsters are *prepared* for adulthood early, rather than *protected* from it until they are psychologically ready to experience it, the temptation to engage in peer-endorsed misbehavior must be extraordinary.

While I do not absolve society of its role in helping to foster misbehavior among the young, my concern in this analysis is parental neglect, and I shall focus my discussion around this issue. To put my argument most straightforwardly, let me assert that, in a society that does not treat its children especially protectively—a society such as ours, the family's role in the development of *middle adolescent* delinquency is likely to be insufficient monitoring. This inadequacy takes many forms and has many reasons: children, especially teenagers, are on their own between the time school lets out and the time parents arrive home from work; this is the so-called *latch-key* problem that has received a good deal of public attention in recent years (Steinberg, 1986). Divorce, marital disruption, and the day-to-day stress of multiple wage-earners juggling multiple jobs have made family life so chaotic in some households that children and parents may not see each other very often, and this takes away from parents' ability to catch up with their children and monitor their activities (Winn, 1984). The increased affluence of the teenage population, in part because of the easy availability of part-time jobs, has made getting away from one's parents easier, which diminishes parental vigilance during nonschool hours (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986). And the stresses of the workplace have made vigilant parenting, which itself is time-consuming and taxing, more difficult. I do have some suggestions for improving the capacity of parents to monitor their charges, but let me save these for a subsequent section of this paper and turn for the moment to the second group of delinquents and their families.

The Family and Early Adolescent Delinquency: The Role of Parental Permissiveness

Earlier, I put forth the hypothesis that prolonged and excessive parental permissiveness often lurks behind *early adolescent* onset delinquency. By permissive parenting I mean parenting in which the parent takes a tolerant, even accepting attitude toward the child's impulses; uses little punishment and avoids asserting parental authority or control; makes few demands on the child for mature behavior; allows the child to regulate his or her own behavior; and offers few rules governing the child's daily schedule (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). **Permissive parenting can occur in the context of warmth—in families, for example, in which parents love their child too much to discipline him or her; or it can occur in the context of parental aloofness—in families, for example, in which parents care too little about their child's welfare (or perhaps more about other concerns) to bother to discipline him or her.** I am not, however, speaking of parents who are abusive or hostile toward their children—children growing up in that sort of environment have problems far more troublesome than *early adolescent* delinquency, as we shall see in a moment. Moreover, the consequences of severe disruption in the parent-child relationship appear prior to early adolescence.

Although children fare better when their parents are warm than when they are cold, permissive parenting appears to have negative effects on children whether it is combined with warmth or with aloofness. The overall pattern of effects sheds light on the role of parental permissiveness in delinquency: compared with their peers who have been raised more restrictively, youngsters who have been raised permissively have been found to be more immature, lacking in impulse control, socially irresponsible, peer oriented, and aggressive (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Since many forms of early delinquent behavior appear to be manifestations of immaturity, social irresponsibility, impulsivity, or aggression, the link between parental permissiveness and early adolescent misbehavior thus appears quite reasonable. Moreover, since so much early adolescent misbehavior occurs within the context of the peer group, and since permissively-raised youngsters are more peer oriented

and less responsible than other children, it makes sense that permissively-raised adolescents will be more susceptible than other adolescents to peer pressure to engage in antisocial activity. In our own study, for example, we find that parental permissiveness is significantly correlated with youngsters' susceptibility to peer pressure to engage in vandalism, stealing, and other forms of misbehavior.

The proposition that *early adolescent* onset delinquency and parental permissiveness are linked is also strengthened by the observation that the ill effects of parental permissiveness appear to be greater for boys than for girls—that is to say, the relation between permissiveness and impulsivity, immaturity, aggression, and irresponsibility most clearly emerges in studies of boys. This, too, fits with the argument I have made, in that rates of delinquency are consistently higher among boys than among girls. Thus it appears that girls are buffered against—but certainly not immune to—the ill effects of parental permissiveness, for reasons not entirely understood. It is probably because society places so much pressure on girls to behave themselves—we are less tolerant of impulsivity and aggression among girls than boys, for instance—that the impact of parental permissiveness may be offset somewhat by societal norms (Bronfenbrenner, 1961).

If parental permissiveness has this impact on children's behavior, why does the impact not clearly emerge until early adolescence, and why does the misbehavior tend to recede after the adolescent years end? The answer inheres in the nature of peer groups and the developmental course of peer relations (Dunphy, 1963). Because peer groups and peer pressure do not begin to intensify until late elementary school (Berndt, 1979), we would not expect to find a great deal of peer-oriented misbehavior, even among permissively-raised youngsters, until late childhood or early adolescence. Similarly, because peer groups and peer pressure begin to wane toward the end of the high school years, so does peer-oriented misbehavior. The ill effects of excessive parental permissiveness are seen during early elementary school, to be sure, and they are probably even seen after high school, but they simply are not manifested in ways that generally draw the attention of parents, teachers, or society. **Indeed, if we were better able to identify early on those youngsters who manifest the**

signs of excessive parental permissiveness, we may find it possible to intervene in ways that diminish the likelihood that early adolescent misbehavior will ensue. Again, let me put aside for the moment my suggestions for intervention and turn instead to the third group of delinquents.

The Family and Preadolescent Delinquency: The Role of Parent-Child Disruption

Preadolescent onset delinquents, as I mentioned earlier, more often than not come from families in which there have been significant disruptions in the parent-child relationship. A close parent-child relationship, or a suitable substitute, is virtually essential for healthy development to occur. **After biological factors, parental rejection—that is, disruption in the parent-child relationship in its most severe form—is the single best predictor of the development of psychopathology among children whose parents have been abusive, cruel, punitive, harsh, or neglectful (Rutter and Garmezy, 1983).**

Not all disruptions take the form of outright rejections, of course, but even less severe disruptions may lead to problems in development. In some cases, for example, the disruption in the parent-child relationship occurs early in infancy and is manifested in what child psychologists sometimes refer to as an *insecure attachment* (Ainsworth, 1982). Insecurity in the attachment relationship has been shown to be predictive of subsequent problems in social relations and psychological development (e.g., Sroufe, 1983), and it is reasonable to assume that youngsters with attachment-related problems are at a greater risk for delinquent behavior, all other factors being equal, than are youngsters with a secure attachment to their parents.

In other cases, the disruption in the parent-child relationship occurs during early childhood and may result from divorce, marital discord, poverty, stress on the family, parental mental illness, or any number of factors that may interfere with healthy family functioning and serve therefore to distance children from their parents, either emotionally or physically. Interestingly, marital discord and divorce appear to take their toll more on boys than girls (Rutter and Garmezy, 1983), which again is consistent with the higher rates of delinquency among

boys than girls; and these factors appear to be more adverse in their impact if they occur earlier in the child's development. Thus, the impact of marital discord on youngsters is worse when it occurs during the preschool years than when it occurs during elementary school or during adolescence (Hetherington, 1981). It is during the preschool years that children begin to develop the foundation for a conscience, and it appears that much of this process is rooted in the child's closeness with his or her parents.

Why should disruption in the parent-child relationship lead to increased levels of delinquency? One can suggest several reasons, and they are not mutually exclusive. First, close parent-child relationships lead children to internalize their parents' standards for behavior, so that children who feel close to their parents are less likely to misbehave, even when their parents are not in sight. Second, it takes relatively more nagging, arguing, punishing, and scolding to manage a child who has not internalized his parents' values than it does to manage one who has. As a consequence, the family environments of youngsters who have not formed close relationships with their parents are likely to be more hostile and unpleasant and are likely to deteriorate into higher and higher levels of hostility, discord, and coercion—all of which perpetuate the child's misbehavior (Patterson, 1982) and provide a model of aggression for the child (Bandura, 1969). Finally, since the parent-child relationship is a two-way street, it is reasonable to assume that parents are less likely to invest the time and energy in monitoring and disciplining children from whom they feel distant than children toward whom they feel close. As a consequence, the problems associated with parental permissiveness and nonvigilance are likely to accompany and compound those associated with emotional detachment.

Disruption in the parent-child relationship is not an inevitable consequence of poverty, marital discord, or family stress—and this is precisely why these factors are not perfect predictors of delinquency. There are parents who are able to maintain close and involved relationships with their children despite circumstances that might be expected to have terrible consequences. **It is important to ask, therefore, what factors permit some parents to maintain close relationships with their children, even in the**

face of forces that are potentially devastating. Research tells us that at least three sets of factors are likely to make a difference (Belsky, 1984).

The first is the parents' level of emotional maturity: parents who are more psychologically healthy themselves have better and more mature relationships with their children. This is consistent with the observation that delinquency often runs in families and that there is some intergenerational transmission of deviance (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). Immature parents are likely to raise troubled children, who themselves are likely to grow up to be immature parents.

The second is the child's constitutional make-up: temperamentally-easy children are easier for parents to raise, and it is reasonable to assume that it takes more stress to disrupt a parent-child relationship with an easy child than it does to disrupt a relationship with a difficult child (Belsky, 1984). This, of course, is consistent with research indicating that temperamentally-difficult children are at greater risk for delinquency, all other factors being equal (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986).

The third mediating factor has to do with the parents' connection with other social institutions and with potential sources of social support—within and outside the family. We know from years of research on stress and support that the latter can buffer individuals against the deleterious effects of the former. A lack of social support has been implicated in child abuse and neglect (e.g., Belsky, 1980; Belsky, 1984). Stress on parents—from work, from marriage, or from the day-to-day demands of life in a difficult environment—is less likely to have an adverse impact on the parent-child relationship when a strong system of social support, including but not only a strong and supportive marriage, is available to the family. **With respect to intervention, therefore, the early identification of parents who themselves have psychological problems, families without support, and families with constitutionally-difficult children, is a pressing priority.**

Thus far, I have argued that the family's role in delinquency is best understood when we distinguish among *preadolescent* onset, *early adolescent* onset, and *middle adolescent* onset delinquents. I noted that the antecedent and concurrent conditions that produce each type of

delinquent are quite different across the three groups. Specifically, I have suggested that a lack of parental monitoring, an excess of parental permissiveness, and early disruption in the parent-child relationship are all related to the increased likelihood that a youngster will be involved in delinquent behavior. Let me now turn to the implications of this view for prevention and intervention.

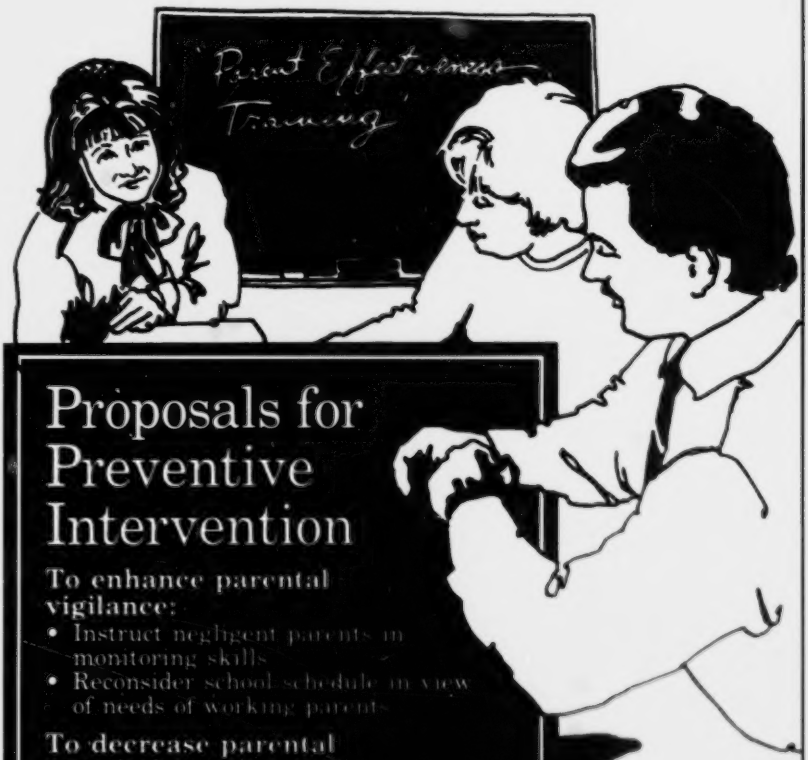
Some Preventive Interventions

Increasing Parental Vigilance

The most significant force interfering with parents' ability to monitor the whereabouts and activities of their adolescents is work. The increase in maternal employment and the large number of single-parent households have made it extremely difficult for adults to maintain contact with their children throughout the day. It is not impossible to keep track of a child's behavior from afar, but it is extraordinarily taxing, and it requires a depth of commitment and understanding between parent and child that many families simply do not enjoy. As I noted earlier, in today's society even a psychologically-competent youngster, left alone and unsupervised for too long a period of time, may be tempted to get involved in activities he or she knows are wrong. **A recent Ford Foundation study, for example, notes that a large number of teenage pregnancies are conceived during weekday afternoon hours, when homes are empty of adults and adolescents are left to fend for themselves** ("Fathers, Earnest and Pathetic," 1985). As long as we have substantial numbers of unsupervised, *latch-key* children, we will have substantial rates of adolescent misbehavior.

We see no signs on the economic horizon that we will return in the near future to the state of affairs in which one parent remains home during the day in order to keep tabs on his or her child's activities. The forces that have led us into this situation will continue to remain strong. In light of this, what, therefore, can we do about the *latch-key* problem?

The most sensible solution, it seems to me, is also the most radical: extend the school day until 5:00 in the afternoon and implement a 12-month school calendar. Children would therefore be in school along a



Proposals for Preventive Intervention

To enhance parental vigilance:

- Instruct negligent parents in monitoring skills
- Reconsider school schedule in view of needs of working parents

To decrease parental permissiveness:

- Expand parent education programs in high school curricula
- Expand parent education programs for new parents
- Develop educational programs for parents of preadolescents
- Teach specific behavioral skills to parents of offending youth

To decrease parent-child disruption

- Reduce rate of teenage pregnancy through school-based clinics
- Target support programs toward high-risk families
- Improve day care services

schedule comparable to that of their parents' work schedule. Today we are living with a school schedule—no school after 3:00 P.M. and no school during the three summer months—that is an anachronism. It was developed during the 19th century, mainly in order to meet the needs of an agricultural society. Children were let out of school mid-afternoon in order to help with farm work, and they had no school at all during the summer in order to be able to work on the family farm during the busiest months of the year. The school schedule made sense then because of the large number of parents who were farmers.

In 1980, only 3 percent of the adult labor force was involved in farm work, and not many of these individuals were working on family farms. Today, about two-thirds of all mothers of school-age children are in the labor force—the vast majority of them not simply by choice but out of economic necessity. **Does it make any sense at all to run today's schools along a timetable that was designed over a hundred years ago, in the context of a society that bears little resemblance to ours now?** Parents who fail to monitor their children's afternoon activities may be neglectful, but failing to adapt school schedules to the obvious and dire needs of working parents is equally negligent on our part.

I should add that requiring youngsters to attend school for more hours each year would bring our national average of yearly school hours up to levels comparable to other industrialized countries (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In light of our students' miserable performance in international comparisons of achievement test scores, lengthening the school day may have some benefits in addition to increasing the degree to which youngsters are monitored by adults.

Extending the school schedule may be a good idea, but I suspect that it is not an idea whose time has come. Unfortunately, voluntary after-school care programs, while sensible for younger children, are not likely to succeed with early adolescents on a wide scale, because many youngsters at this age view such programs as childish. I suspect that the adolescent youngsters who would voluntarily attend an after-school care program are probably those the least in need of the additional supervision. **In the meantime, therefore, what can we do to increase parental monitoring**

and obviate the problems caused by the *latch-key* phenomenon?

We have looked into this in a study of nearly 900 10- to 16-year-olds attending public school in Madison, Wisconsin (Steinberg, 1986). **Our findings indicate that three practices in particular may make a differ-**

The first relevant finding is that youngsters are less likely to get into trouble if they go home after school—even if a parent is not home—than if they go to a friend's house or *hang out* somewhere in the community. The second finding is that youngsters are less likely to get into trouble if their parents exercise control *in absentia*, by setting up a clearly-defined schedule of activities for the youngster to follow (including, perhaps, household chores, homework, and so forth); or by requiring some sort of telephone contact during the afternoon. The good news is that we find this information extremely easy to communicate to parents, and parents find these practices to be sensible and workable.

These two findings have implications for individuals working within the juvenile justice system as well. If, based on an individual youngster's history, it appears that he or she falls into the category of a *middle adolescent* onset delinquent—that is, no history of misbehavior prior to high school—it would be wise to determine if a lack of parental vigilance is the problem. If this is indeed the case, a discussion with the parent or parents about how to improve their monitoring is in order. The more concrete the advice is, the better. **If a parent has raised a youngster who has stayed out of trouble for 15 years, we can assume that he or she has probably done a reasonably good job and that some informal, educational intervention applied swiftly and sensitively may take care of the problem.** Sometimes parents are so caught up in work and other responsibilities that they just need to be reminded about practices that make for good parenting. Many parents may not realize that youngsters still need vigilant parental involvement throughout adolescence. The juvenile justice system can help improve parents' monitoring abilities by monitoring parents themselves.

The third finding from our study of *latch-key* youngsters is both the most obvious and at the same time the most profound. *Latch-key* children who have been raised permissively fare worse when they are left on their own than do *latch-key* children who have been raised more

authoritatively. In other words, **how parents act toward their children when they are with them has an impact on how their children behave when their parents are not available.** Adolescents who were raised permissively as children are less able to stand up to the pressures and temptations of the peer group and therefore are in need of more careful day-to-day monitoring than are other youngsters. Conversely, children whose parents have had a longstanding history of competent, involved child-rearing reap the benefits of this treatment throughout the adolescent years (Baumrind, 1978): they behave well even when their parents are not around. Let me turn, therefore, to the issue of parental permissiveness and consider whether it is possible to intervene to help parents become less permissive.

Decreasing Parental Permissiveness

In a now classic study of adolescent-parent relationships, families of Danish youngsters were contrasted with families of American youth (Kandel and Lesser, 1972). The study illustrates something extremely important about adolescents' *needs* for independence and autonomy. These researchers examined, among other things, how independent youngsters *felt,* how close youngsters and their parents were to one another, and how strictly youngsters had been raised. One of the most important findings to emerge from this study was that in *both* cultures the adolescents who felt the most free, that is, the most independent, came from families where parent-child relationships were close rather than distant. The findings of this study have now been confirmed over and over again by different researchers studying different groups of parents and children (Hill, 1980; 1986). **The bottom line is always the same: youngsters achieve responsible independence during adolescence not by breaking away from their parents but by remaining close to them.**

The findings concerning parental permissiveness in the Danish-American contrast are also telling. Although the connection between closeness and autonomy was found in each culture, there were important differences between the Danish and American families with respect to parental control. The Danish parents and teenagers reported having fewer rules, more closeness, and fewer adolescent behavior problems. Danish adolescents also

were more likely to report going to their parents for advice than were the American youngsters. Although the Danish youngsters felt more independent than their American counterparts, their independence did not translate into misbehavior. The reason: the healthy sense of independence experienced by the Danish youngsters in all likelihood permitted these adolescents to remain *independent* in the face of peer pressure (e.g., Devereux, 1970).

A closer look at the child-rearing practices of the Danes informs us as to how this admirable end result was achieved. In contrast to the Americans, Danish parents are quite strict when their children are young. As their children get older, however, Danish parents gradually increase the amount of independence they permit, in a manner closely linked to the child's increasing capacity for autonomy. In America, we tend to follow the opposite pattern: here, parents are exceedingly permissive when their children are young and become strict generally in response to misbehavior and transgression. Watch a typical American parent with a preschooler: more often than not, the child is indulged until finally something happens that the parent does not like, and then the boom is lowered. **Parental control here is a *reactive* form of punishment, not a *proactive* part of a child-rearing philosophy.**

Many parents prefer the American model because most of the time it is easier and more pleasant. Since most young children's misbehavior is relatively harmless, it is fairly simple to indulge the child most of the time and save the discipline for problem situations. We find, not surprisingly, that youngsters argue less often with permissive parents than with stricter ones. The problem with the American model, though, is that sooner or later the child's misbehavior will cease to be innocuous and it may become dangerous or otherwise troublesome. However, by this point in time the posture of permissiveness has been in place for so long that it is often difficult to change tactics without outside help. Some parents at this point become excessively strict—a reaction that inevitably backfires. And in some situations, the outcome is *early adolescent* onset delinquency—delinquency that is the result of youngsters not being able to resist peer pressure to go along with the crowd and do what they know is wrong.

As I mentioned earlier, parental control must be

accompanied by warmth and affection to be effective—it is the combined impact of the two that appears to work. I am not advocating blind authoritarianism as a child-rearing approach; indeed, we know that this has harmful effects of its own on children. Excessive strictness leads to shyness and withdrawal in some cases, and to aggression and rebellion in others (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). **I am suggesting, however, that parents ought to adopt what psychologists call an *authoritative* position in child-rearing—a posture that combines warmth, involvement, authority, and legitimate control.**

How might we increase the prevalence of authoritative parenting among American parents? Four approaches appear to have promise. **The first—and here again is a radical proposal—is that we teach parenting skills in a systematic fashion to all high school students,** males as well as females, as a part of their required curriculum. I am not alone in calling for this, and it is by no means a new idea (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1974). We have had for some time now a body of scientific evidence on effective parenting and on the antecedents of healthy child development, but most of it never reaches the individuals who need it the most—parents. I realize full well that schools are already overburdened with responsibilities and demands on instructional time, and that many educators balk at the idea of using school time to teach anything other than the *basics.* But perhaps it is time that we started thinking of parenting as one of the *basics;* after all, effective parenting is as necessary for our survival as a society as are reading, writing, arithmetic, or operating a personal computer. Our failure to take responsibility for educating individuals in how to be more effective parents is but another example of our own parental neglect.

The second approach is to implement or expand parenting classes for new parents. Successful parent-child development centers have been put into operation in different parts of the country, and programs have been aimed at teaching effective parenting at a time when mothers and fathers are highly motivated to learn these skills and acquire new information. There may never be another time in a parent's career when he or she is more susceptible to parent education than in the months immediately following the birth of a first child—partly, and unfortunately, because we keep people

in the dark about the business of parenting throughout the high school years. Many new parents, therefore, are likely to be desperate for information. Programs for new parents can be organized and promoted as extensions of childbirth classes (in which a large proportion of first-time parents enroll), as continuation of classes administered by hospitals and begun during the first few days after birth, or by nurse practitioners working with pediatricians in well-baby medical programs.

A third approach is to teach parenting skills to the parents of preteenagers. Such educational programs can be administered through school-based organizations, such as the PTA, or through religious or community organizations. These programs might deal with specific issues of discipline, responsibility-training, and communication skills. Now it is almost certain that the parents who are most in need of help will not be the ones who will enroll in parent education programs—but I do not believe that this should dissuade us from offering these programs to parents who want them. For one thing, there is nothing wrong with making good parents better. For another, even good parents may need help in anticipating the special problems that may arise at adolescence. For a third, the more we can bring parents together to discuss their common concerns, the more likely we will be to generate a shared sense of community values and norms that will help the community of parents function *as a community*—and not as an isolated set of families. In some communities, for example, parents have found it helpful to learn just what sorts of rules and expectations other parents have for their own children; it is insurance against the oft-heard plea, "all the other kids get to do it."

The final approach is to teach parenting skills to parents who clearly are in need of some help. The most recent research on this indicates that it is indeed possible to teach parents new and more effective techniques and that, once acquired, these new techniques make a difference in children's behavior. Perhaps one of the most encouraging findings in this light comes from a series of studies that examined the impact of an intervention designed to improve parenting techniques on several families with an adolescent referred for delinquency or other misbehavior. The evaluation showed not only a significant decrease in misbehavior among the *problem* children, but significant improvements in the

behavior of their siblings as well (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). This is extremely important, for it suggests that these sorts of parenting interventions may actually change parents' general style of parenting and not simply alter their relationship with a particular child.

A few words are in order about the nature of this sort of intervention. First, it is not *family therapy* in the conventional sense of the term; its focus is on changing parenting behavior and teaching very specific parenting skills, rather than on understanding the dynamics of parent-child relationships. It can be used effectively, therefore, with all sorts of families, including single-parent households and stepfamilies. Second, the intervention is designed to teach parents, through instruction and modeling, the very principles that have been found to be related to healthy child development; thus, the intervention is rooted in the scientific study of children and parents. Finally, the thrust of the intervention is to teach very specific skills—skills such as monitoring, the establishment and maintenance of consistent expectations for the child's behavior, and the daily management of the child's behavior through appropriate punishment, reinforcement, and explanation. In short, the intervention teaches parents how to be authoritative.

There are implications in this for those who work within the juvenile justice system. It would be helpful to determine, in cases of *early adolescent* onset or *middle adolescent* onset delinquency, whether the pattern of misbehavior is associated with excessive parental permissiveness. If this is found to be the case, it is not too late to attempt to intervene to change parenting practices. This requires a more comprehensive intervention than does increasing parental vigilance alone, but it can be done successfully by a skilled practitioner. As you probably can guess, the earlier this intervention is implemented, the more likely it will be successful. You may already have practitioners in your community who are employing these techniques in their treatment of families. If not, you may want to look into starting a parenting-effectiveness program based on one or more of the successful models already in place in other parts of the country.

Programs designed to increase parental effectiveness and parental vigilance are only successful when parents are involved enough with their children to participate,

however. Moreover, increased parental vigilance and improved parental management skills outside of the context of a warm and involved parent-child relationship are likely to be interpreted by the child as autocratic and illegitimate. Consequently, attempts to effect these goals in families where parents are emotionally uninvolved may backfire. Thus, **one of the most important determinations that you can make is whether the parents have had a history of inadequate emotional involvement in the parent-child relationship.** This is a difficult assessment, for it is sometimes the case that parents detach themselves from a child *after* the child has begun to get into trouble. What is important to determine, however, is the history of the parent-child relationship, not its status at the time you first have contact with the child. If, in your judgment, the parent-child relationship has been disrupted since the child's early years, there is probably no family-based intervention that will be successful.

This leads to a discussion of intervening with the *preadolescent* onset delinquent, for whom parent-child disruption has probably been longstanding.

Minimizing Disruption in the Parent-Child Relationship

I argued earlier that there is a good deal of evidence available suggesting that youngsters who begin their delinquent careers early are psychosocially different from those who begin in adolescence, and that the most likely antecedent of misbehavior early on in life is some sort of disruption in the parent-child relationship. In view of this then, let me pose, and then attempt to answer, three questions. First, is there any hope, after adolescence, for a chronic juvenile offender with a history of poor parent-child relations? Second, to what extent can we identify children with disrupted family relations at the earliest age possible, and what steps can we take to minimize the chances of these youngsters becoming delinquent? Finally, what are the causes of disruption in the parent-child relationship, and what steps can society take to reduce the number of children who grow up under this sort of jeopardy?

I find very little compelling evidence that anything other than diversion or incarceration is effective in dealing with the chronic juvenile offender once he has passed through early adolescence. Thus the short-term

goal with chronic offenders who have reached adolescence ought to be, above all, to keep the youngster off drugs, under the close supervision of adults, and away from peers who may pull him back into trouble. The mid-term goal should be to try to teach him some vocational skills that may increase his chances of securing gainful employment during young adulthood. The long-term goal should be to keep him under watch until he is out of the developmental danger zone—that is, until he has passed out of his early 20s, after which point the likelihood of criminal behavior drops substantially. Whether diversion or incarceration is the preferred approach should depend on how dangerous to the community the individual is. My message to those of you who are working on the front lines with these youngsters is one of consolation; it is difficult to find anything that works very systematically, but don't give up, and don't despair.

On a related note, I think a word or two is in order about recent proposals to implement mandatory sentencing for juveniles based on a point system that takes into account the seriousness and history of a youngster's record. As a developmental psychologist, I was baffled by the way in which the proposal calls for consideration of the offender's age, namely, that the younger the age of the offender, the more lenient the treatment should be. Presumably, this is based on the intuitively-appealing notion that older youth have more control over their behavior and ought to *know better* than a younger individual. Although this policy may make some intuitive sense, it runs counter to what we know about the relation between age of onset of delinquency and the likelihood of a continued career of misbehavior. Given these findings, the younger the age at which a youngster is involved in delinquent activity, the more *serious*—not the more lenient—our response should be.

In view of the imperviousness of chronic offenders to treatment after adolescence, it behooves us to act as swiftly as possible in the early identification of youngsters whose relationships with their parents are disrupted. In many cases, pathological family relationships are amenable to treatment—as long as the treatment occurs sufficiently early in the child's history. But in some cases, the history of disruption is so longstanding that one must consider the removal of the child from his parents' custody.

This admittedly strong measure may be appropriate when: (1) there is sufficient and conclusive evidence that the child has begun developing a career as a delinquent—repeated serious and violent offenses prior to adolescence, for example; and (2) when there is evidence of irremediable disruption in the child's family relationships—longstanding patterns of domestic violence and other forms of child abuse, profound drug- and alcohol-related problems, or prolonged and serious levels of family conflict (see Rutter and Giller, 1983). The early removal of the child from this sort of home environment and subsequent placement in foster care—either short-term or long-term—coupled with a broad-based program of therapeutic intervention may be effective during the preadolescent years (Rutter and Giller, 1983).

Early identification and intervention in cases of parent-child disruption is difficult and expensive, however. The most important question, therefore, is whether we as a society can take any steps at all to prevent disruption in the parent-child relationship before it occurs. I think the answer is yes, but it will take some doing. The cost of preventing disruption in the early parent-child relationship, however, is far, far less than the price we ultimately pay later on. Failing to anticipate and prevent the development of disruptive parent-child relationships is yet another example of our negligent attitude toward parents.

The first step in a comprehensive program to reduce disruption in the parent-child relationship is a systematic national effort to reduce the number of children born to parents who do not have the psychological or economic resources necessary to raise their children effectively. This means, first and foremost, **a national effort to dramatically reduce the incidence of teenage childbearing.** Children born to teenage mothers are more likely to experience virtually all of the factors that increase the risk of developing behavioral problems later on. When we look at our scandalously-high rate of teenage parenthood, we are looking at the intergenerational transmission of social problems.

We now have the knowledge necessary to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy; the only question is whether we are willing to do what it takes. Encouraging youngsters toward celibacy, while perhaps morally appealing, is not a practical solution. For one thing, comparisons of

the United States with other industrialized countries indicate that, while rates of *pregnancy* among teenagers are far higher than they are among foreign youth, rates of *sexual activity* are no greater (Jones et al., 1985). **Thus the problem in contemporary America is not sexual activity among the young; it is careless, unprotected sexual activity.**

But there is hope on the horizon: after years of experimentation with different sorts of programs, recent studies now indicate that a two-pronged intervention significantly decreases the rate of teenage pregnancy (Zabin et al., 1986). One prong includes counseling and education about sex, birth control, and family planning. The other prong involves the provision of *school-based* health clinics, where students can receive contraceptives, counseling, and information. What is especially interesting is that neither of these components works alone: **sex education without access to contraceptives changes youngsters' attitudes and knowledge but not their behavior; access to contraceptives without education places birth control in students' hands without any understanding of how or why to use it.** And, to assuage any fears you may have, studies also indicate that interventions of this sort *do not increase* rates of sexual activity.

The first step toward reducing disrupted parent-child relationships is, therefore, reducing the rate of teenage childbearing. The second step is the provision of information, advice, and support to parents whose children, by virtue of both constitutional and environmental factors, are known to be at high risk for developmental problems. Such high-risk infants include those youngsters born—prematurely, at a low birth weight, with medical problems or handicaps—into stressful or impoverished home environments, or born to parents who themselves suffer from disabling psychological problems. High-risk infants are more likely to be abused and otherwise mistreated by parents and are therefore at greater risk for disrupted parent-child relations (Belsky, 1980). **Intervention during the neonatal period, aimed at improving the quality of the infant's physical and emotional environment, has been shown to be effective in heading off a range of subsequent problems, many of which are themselves predictive of misbehavior and delinquency.** Moreover, these programs have been shown to be less expensive than the

cost of repairing the psychological and social damage caused by inattention to families at risk (Olds, 1986). The programs generally include home visits during the infant years by nurse practitioners, social workers, and nutritionists who instruct and support parents in areas concerning child health and development, family relationships, and diet.

Finally, we must examine our policies concerning day care and our policies concerning parental leave from employment during the first year of an infant's life. I say this because there is now some evidence that day care during the first 12 months of life, once thought to be innocuous, may in some circumstances have a disruptive impact on the parent-child relationship. **The evidence is not overwhelming but it certainly is suggestive, for it indicates that youngsters who have been in day care for a substantial amount of time during the first year are more likely to show a variety of ill effects than their peers who have not had early day care experience.** The adverse effects seem to appear among children in both good- and poor-quality care, but are likely to be strongest among children who have been placed in poor-quality care, characterized by a high ratio of youngsters to caregivers, high staff turnover, and inadequate staff training. Specifically, youngsters who have been enrolled in day care during the first 12 months of life are more likely than other children to be poorly attached to their parents as two-year-olds, more aggressive and impulsive as preschoolers, and more peer oriented and disobedient as elementary school children (Belsky, 1986). Some of these characteristics, you may recall, are precursors of problem and delinquent behavior during adolescence. Obviously, and fortunately, the majority of children who have spent time in day care do not grow up to be juvenile offenders—but these recent studies suggest that we may want to look more closely at the quality of a youngster's early child-care arrangements and their long-term impact. Moreover, we shall need to consider ways in which we can enable parents to pursue their occupational careers without jeopardizing their children's development. There is an urgent need for high-quality day care—not simply because infants need high-quality day care to survive, but because the long-term effects of placement in poor-quality infant care may come back to haunt us when

these infants grow up to be adolescents. In contrast, studies of high-quality care during the preschool years show long-lasting positive effects on youngsters' behavior and schooling.

Parental Neglect and the Neglect of Parents

In some regards, the failure of parents to monitor, discipline, or remain emotionally invested in their children can be construed as parental neglect. It is negligent not to know one's child's whereabouts and activities. It is negligent to raise a child without providing guidelines for behavior, without demanding maturity, or without imposing controls or restrictions when they are called for. And it is negligent to bring a child into the world without being totally committed to loving and caring for that child through thick and thin. In these regards, one can certainly say that parental neglect is behind a tremendous amount of delinquency.

At the same time, however, it seems only fair to acknowledge that forces beyond the family influence the way in which parents function, and that parental neglect is a consequence, in part, of our own neglect of parents. It is easier for a parent to be vigilant about a child's behavior when both parent and child are home together than when the parent must monitor that child from a distant workplace. It is easier to parent effectively when one is an informed parent, when the level of stress in one's life is minimal, and when one has access to sources of social support than when financial, marital, and work problems, or ignorance about parenting, make it difficult to remain level-headed, reasonable, and patient. And it is easier to become, and to remain, emotionally involved in raising a child when that child has been born out of love and choice, rather than out of ignorance and fear, and when the parent-child relationship is protected during the first years of life.

Although this a reasonable enough set of propositions, we, as a society, do not seem willing or able to act upon them. **Although we recognize in theory that good parenting flourishes under certain conditions and withers under others, we do not take the necessary steps to nurture its development. Parental neglect is the obvious and inevitable byproduct of society's neglect of parents.**

Why do we neglect parents? One is tempted to say, "because it is expensive to do otherwise." But consider how much we now spend on the *consequences* of parental neglect. So, to those who ask, "Who is going to foot the bill?" my response is, "You already are—you just don't realize it."

We have always felt uncomfortable attacking social problems by aiming our efforts at their prior causes, especially where the family is concerned. We continue to believe that parenting is a private function, and that family life should be protected from government interference at all costs. But it strikes me as foolish to believe that society should treat family life as an entirely private matter when we know full well that, ultimately, the costs of society's neglect of parents are borne by all of us anyway. Family life is not a private matter when society's resources are being spent on juvenile corrections, adolescent drug and alcohol treatment, and programs for unwed mothers. **We must relinquish the idea that intervening after problems are discovered is socially responsible and humanistic, but that intervening before problems occur is governmental interference.**

A second cause of our neglect of families is rooted in the erroneous belief that parenting is a *natural* skill, and that any adult who is biologically able to become a parent is necessarily endowed with the tools and knowledge to be a psychological parent, too. To be sure, the majority of parents do well enough, but they would certainly do better with more knowledge and better prior preparation. And a minority of parents clearly are in need of education and socialization for effective parenting. As we know from studies of other primates, these individuals are themselves likely to have been raised incompetently (Harlow, 1958). Our failure to try to increase parental effectiveness is an appalling example of our negligence toward parents. It is especially shocking in light of how much research money we have spent studying parent-child relationships. **We know what works and we know why. We have a wealth of evidence that effective parenting *can* be taught and that parental effectiveness *can* be increased through carefully designed and implemented educational programs.**

The third and final reason concerns values. **In our zealousness for individual rights, and our commit-**

ment to respecting and protecting family diversity, we have retreated from the simple truth that some ways of raising children are better than others. There is now enough cross-cultural evidence to indicate that there are fundamental principles of good parenting—around the world—that enhance children's abilities to function as competent, happy, responsible, and loving individuals. Children fare better when their parents are warm and involved than when they are cold and distant; when their parents are sensitive and responsive to their needs; when their parents set reasonable and realistic standards for their behavior and enforce them in a consistent fashion; and when parents legitimate their attempts to control their children's behavior with reason and justification rather than with power and physical aggression (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). **It is time we stopped pretending that all approaches to child-rearing are equally valid, and started teaching parents—many of whom are desperate for information—what we know works.**

The truth of the matter is that we have been as neglectful toward parents as neglectful parents are toward their own children. Like negligent parents, we have failed to be vigilant about the business of parenting. Like permissive parents, we have failed to socialize our charges—society's adults—into effective parents. And like distant parents, we have failed to be supportive, responsive, and attentive caretakers of individuals in need of our involvement. Not until we reverse our own pattern of neglect toward parents can we expect parents to exercise their responsibilities toward their own children.

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Parenting and Delinquency:

Parent Training and Delinquency Prevention

David P. Farrington

In a nutshell, Professor Steinberg's paper argues that more emphasis should be given to preventing rather than treating delinquency, and that parent training might be an effective prevention technique. In general, I welcome these proposals. However, **I also think that we must learn from past experience and be careful not to let our enthusiasm run ahead of our data. High expectations about new techniques for combating crime have usually been followed by an over-reactive disappointment in the past.**

While I agree with Professor Steinberg's cure, I find his diagnosis—of three types of delinquents distinguished primarily by age at onset and correlated with different child rearing techniques—more doubtful. In my paper, I will begin by reviewing how far his arguments about delinquency and parenting techniques seem plausible in the light of empirical evidence, and I will then review what is known about delinquency prevention through parent training.

Has Delinquency Increased?

Professor Steinberg begins by asserting that dramatic increases in knowledge about delinquency in the past 25 years have been outpaced by increases in delinquency itself. However, this claim does not seem to be supported by official arrest statistics in the United States. **The age-specific arrest rates recently published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1986) for the period 1965-1984 show that, in general, arrests of juveniles for index offenses increased between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s and have since decreased up to the mid-1980s.**

According to my calculations, the arrest rate for the eight index offenses for males aged 13-17 increased from about 49 per 1000 population in 1965 to about 71 per 1000 in 1974, and then decreased to about 54 per 1000

in 1984. (These figures are only approximate, since they do not take account of the slightly different numbers of persons in each age group between 13 and 17). The corresponding figures per 1000 population for females were 7 in 1965, 16 in 1974, and 14 in 1984. The decline between 1974 and 1984 was greater for non-violent offenses, which decreased by 25 percent for males and by 17 percent for females. Violent offenses decreased by 10 percent for males but did not change markedly for females.

It could of course be argued that these recent decreases in juvenile arrest rates reflect changes in police reactions rather than in juvenile offending. I do not know of any evidence in favor of (or against) this assertion. **Assuming that juvenile offending had decreased in reality, then the delinquency picture is clearly not as black as Professor Steinberg paints. I am not sure of the explanation of the recent decrease, but I would hesitate to argue that it could be attributed to increases in knowledge.**

Methods of Dealing With Delinquency

In general, methods of dealing with delinquency are not based on modern knowledge about its causes. Therefore, we should not be surprised at the lack of success of intervention techniques. However, there are some glimmers of hope. While counseling generally seems to be ineffective, there is some evidence that it reduces delinquency among the more neurotic, intelligent, and articulate offenders (Palmer, 1978; Wilson, 1980). Similarly, offending can sometimes be suppressed by institutional treatment over and above any incapacitative effects (Murray and Cox, 1979; but see Maltz, Gordon, McDowall, and McCleary, 1980).

The major problem with most treatment techniques is that there is no attempt to change the environment to which the juvenile returns after the treatment. We know that behavior is greatly affected by rewards and punishments in the social environment (Farrington, 1979a). We should not, therefore, be surprised if juveniles behave well in institutions and then revert to their old delinquent habits when they return to the family, peer, and community environments in which those habits

were learned. Interventions directed at these environments might be more successful.

I am not sure why Professor Steinberg should focus on juvenile diversion as an effective approach. **There is a good deal of evidence showing that the introduction of diversion programs in the United States and England in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to a considerable widening of the net of recorded juvenile offenders** (Farrington and Bennett, 1981; Klein, 1979). Indeed, this may have been one of the most important reasons for the large increase in recorded juvenile delinquency in both countries between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. Furthermore, large-scale, well-designed, experimental evaluations of diversion programs—providing counseling, recreational, employment, and educational services—show that they are no more effective in preventing reoffending than traditional juvenile court processing or no treatment at all (Dunford, Osgood, and Weichselbaum, 1982; Severy and Whitaker, 1982).

Perhaps the most hopeful diversion experiment was carried out in Costa Mesa and Huntington Beach, California, by Binder, Monahan, and Newkirk (1976). This was a comparison between a diversion program and no treatment. The program was based on behavioral principles and aimed to teach parents effective ways of giving rewards and imposing sanctions, to teach juveniles coping skills, to teach families effective methods of communication, and to provide volunteer adult models for long-term imitation and friendship (Binder and Newkirk, 1977). In this experiment, the diverted juveniles had a lower recidivism rate during a one-year follow-up period than the control group, and interviews with the juveniles and their parents also showed that the diverted juveniles were better behaved. Hence, diversion programs based on parent training can sometimes be effective.

Age at Onset

Professor Steinberg is surely right to focus on the age of onset of juvenile offending as an important variable. Numerous studies show that those who begin offending at the earliest ages tend to become the most persistent and chronic offenders (Loeber, 1982). Professor Steinberg divides delinquents into three

categories—*preadolescent, early* adolescent, and *middle* adolescent—primarily on the basis of age of onset.

He argues that *preadolescent* delinquents become the most persistent and chronic offenders. They are aggressive and troublesome in their elementary schools, and tend to come from large, poor families. However, their chief familial antecedent is disruption of the parent-child relationship reflecting marital discord, divorce, or cruel, harsh, or neglectful parents. The *early adolescent* delinquents suffer from excessive parental permissiveness, and are unusually susceptible to peer pressure. The *middle adolescent* delinquents suffer from poor parental vigilance and monitoring, and may be *latch-key* children with two working parents. They may have committed just one or two delinquent acts without getting caught, and they may be statistically normal in many respects.

Professor Steinberg is careful to point out that his propositions have not been tested directly. I can test them to some extent by quoting results obtained in the prospective longitudinal survey, which I am currently directing, of over 400 London males from age 8 to age 32. Twenty boys were first convicted of criminal (non-traffic) offenses at the earliest ages of 10-12, 34 at ages 13-14, and 30 at ages 15-16. Professor Steinberg might regard them as *preadolescent, early adolescent,* and *middle adolescent* delinquents respectively. However, he might object to the use of official records to define these categories.

At ages 14 and 16, our boys completed a 38-item self-reported delinquency questionnaire (Farrington, 1973). For ease of comparison with the 84 convicted juvenile delinquents, the 80 boys with the highest self-report scores (at the two ages combined) were identified. There was a considerable overlap between official and self-report measures, since 41 of the boys with the highest admitted delinquency were official delinquents. Following Professor Steinberg's terminology, 65 percent of our *preadolescent* delinquents had high self-report scores, in comparison with 44 percent of *early* and 43 percent of the *middle adolescent* delinquents. **Hence, our *preadolescent* delinquents were the worst behaved according to their own admissions, and both of the other two groups were badly behaved in comparison with the rest of the sample (12 percent of whom were high on self-reported offending).**

Professor Steinberg might complain that our *middle adolescent* delinquents, who were first convicted at ages 15 or 16, are too extreme and not the comparatively normal group that he was describing. Hence, I will also focus on our *middle adolescent* self-reported delinquents—the 39 boys who had high self-report scores at ages 14-16 but who were not convicted (Farrington, 1979b). We reported comparisons between these 39 boys and the 84 convicted delinquents. If the definition of delinquency was widened to include all those who had committed at least one or two delinquent acts, there would be hardly anyone left to compare them with. For example, 90 percent of the sample admitted minor fraud (traveling without a ticket), and 82 percent admitted minor vandalism (breaking windows of empty houses) (Farrington, 1973). In studies of the causes or prevention of delinquency, our focus should surely be on those who are relatively more frequent and more serious offenders.

Up to their twenty-fifth birthday, our *preadolescent* delinquents, first convicted at ages 10-12, accumulated the most convictions (7 on average, in comparison with 4 for *early* and *middle adolescent* offenders). They also had the longest criminal careers, defined as the time between the first and last convictions (8 years on average, in comparison with 5 years for the *early* and 4 for the *middle adolescent* offenders). **Professor Steinberg may well be right to argue that the *preadolescent* onset offenders are also the most resistent to intervention, since these delinquents have received many different treatments that have failed to stop their offending.**

In most respects, our *preadolescent* delinquents were the most deprived. For example, 70 percent of them were rated troublesome at ages 8-10 by teachers and peers, in comparison with 38 percent of early and 43 percent of *middle adolescent* delinquents. The percentage of troublesome boys among the *middle adolescent* self-reported delinquents (21 percent) was only slightly higher than in the remainder of the sample (15 percent). Much the same pattern of results was also obtained with low family income, large family size, and low intelligence, all measured at ages 8-10.

Age of Onset and Parenting

I will concentrate on parental behavior for 8 years olds because this is clearly a precursor and possible cause rather than a consequence of children's offending. Child-rearing techniques are, of course, likely to vary with the age of the child. Most of our measures of parenting for 8 year olds were highly related. Cruel, passive, or neglectful parental attitudes were correlated with harsh or erratic parental discipline and parental conflict. Therefore, we developed a global rating of parental child-rearing behavior which was a combination of all three of these. Parental supervision, which referred to vigilance and watchfulness, was less closely related to other measures, and so it was studied separately.

According to Professor Steinberg, the *preadolescent* delinquents have received especially poor parental child-rearing behavior, and this indeed was found (63 percent of the *preadolescents* receiving it, in comparison with 28 percent of the *early* and 38 percent of the *middle adolescent* delinquents, 21 percent of the self-reported delinquents, and 20 percent of the remainder). However, his prediction that the *middle adolescents* should be most extreme in receiving poor parental supervison was not borne out (41 percent of the *preadolescents* received it, in comparison with 21 percent of the early and 36 percent of the *middle adolescent* delinquents, 35 percent of the self-reported delinquents, and 14 percent of the remainder).

Professor Steinberg suggests that there is some doubt in the literature about whether delinquents are disproportionally drawn from broken homes. However, it seems to me that consistent results are generally obtained when the cause of the break is taken into account. West and Farrington (1973) and Wadsworth (1979) both found that boys from homes broken by death were not particularly likely to become delinquents, but that boys from homes broken by parental separation, desertion, or divorce were. McCord's (1982) research also showed that it was not the broken home itself that produced delinquency but the parental conflict that lay behind the break.

Professor Steinberg predicts that *preadolescent* delinquents are especially characterized by marital discord or divorce. In our research, the boys first convicted at ages

10-12 included the highest proportion who had been separated from their parents for reasons other than death or hospitalization. However, low family income, large family size, and poor parental child-rearing behavior were far more characteristic of these boys' families.

Against the proposal that the *middle adolescent* delinquents tended to be *latch-key* children, the boys in our sample whose mothers were in full-time work when they were aged 8-10 were less likely to become delinquents of any type. Also, against the proposal that peer pressure was particularly important for the *early adolescent* delinquents, the *preadolescent* delinquents were the most likely to have delinquent friends at age 14.

There was only one exception to the general rule that the *preadolescent* delinquents were the most extreme. Far more of the *middle adolescent* delinquents had criminal parents (63 percent of them, in comparison with 40 percent of *preadolescents* and 32 percent of *early adolescent* delinquents). Only slightly more of the self-reported delinquents had criminal parents than the remainder of the sample (26 percent as opposed to 20 percent). **Criminal parents clearly predicted both delinquent behavior and selection for official processing. West and Farrington (1977) showed that, at every level of self-reported offending, boys with criminal parents were more likely to be convicted than those with non-criminal parents.**

In general, the boys who began offending at different ages varied in degree rather than in kind. The *preadolescent* delinquents were the most deprived and the most troublesome at ages 8-10, and they proved to be the most persistent and chronic offenders. Their parents tended to use harsh and erratic discipline and poor supervision. Hence, parent training targeted on these boys at an early age, if effective, could have disproportionate benefits in reducing crime. Furthermore, given the association—noted by Professor Steinberg—between delinquency and school failure, alcohol and drug use, adolescent pregnancy, and so on, effective parent training could alleviate a much wider range of social problems than crime alone.

Parental Family Management Techniques and Delinquency

While there does not seem to be consistent evidence in favor of Professor Steinberg's hypotheses linking different parenting methods to the delinquency of different onset ages, there is a great deal of evidence showing that child-rearing techniques are among the best predictors of all juvenile delinquency. Indeed, in their extensive review of delinquency prediction, Loeber and Dishion (1983) concluded that parental family management techniques were the best predictors, followed by child problem behavior, family criminality, and poor educational achievement. Much of the evidence linking parenting and delinquency has been exhaustively reviewed by Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986).

McCord (1979) carried out one of the most interesting investigations in her 30-year follow-up of about 250 boys treated (by means of friendly counseling) in the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study in Boston. She found that poor parental supervision, parental aggressiveness (including harsh discipline), parental conflict, and a passive or rejecting maternal attitude all predicted offending. Robins (1979), in her follow-up studies in St. Louis, also reported that poor supervision and discipline were consistent early precursors of later offending. These results agree well with those obtained in our London survey. **Harsh or erratic parental discipline, cruel, passive, or neglectful parental attitude, poor supervision, and parental conflict, all measured at age 8, all predicted official and self-reported juvenile delinquency (West and Farrington, 1973).**

Since parental child-rearing techniques are among the best predictors of delinquency, and since they predict independently of other early precursors, it is plausible to suggest that they are causes of delinquency. Indeed, a number of theories (e.g., Trasler, 1962; Hirschi, 1969; Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton, 1985) include parenting in the causal chain leading to delinquency. The emphasis on parenting in this paper should not be interpreted as implying that other factors—such as individual, peer group, school, or situational ones—may not also be important causes. However, **if child-rearing techniques do have causal effects, it follows that changes in parenting could**

lead to decreases in offending. This is the major empirical and theoretical justification for the use of parent training to prevent delinquency.

Dimensions of Parenting

Parent training should be based on theories of how different aspects of parenting cause delinquency. This immediately leads to the key theoretical problem of how many different dimensions of parenting should be distinguished. Maccoby and Martin (1983) reviewed existing classification systems and highlighted two major dimensions: acceptance or rejection of the child, and low or high control by the parents. These produced four major types of parenting: authoritative (firm but kindly); authoritarian or power assertive, indulgent or permissive; and neglectful or indifferent.

Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986) identified four dimensions of parenting: neglect (including poor supervision and permissiveness); conflict (between parent and child, including very harsh or erratic parental discipline); modeling (of aggressive or criminal behavior by parents); and disruption (including broken homes and parental disharmony).

In the light of the empirical evidence, my preferred dimensions would be slightly different: the warmth of the relationship between parent and child; supervision or monitoring; harshness of parental discipline (including physical punishment); inconsistency of disciplinary techniques; and conflict between the parents. **If we could increase warmth, improve monitoring, decrease harshness, increase consistency, and decrease conflict, we surely should be able to decrease child problem behavior and ultimately delinquency.** It would also be interesting to study interactive effects of these dimensions, such as whether favorable features on outcome can counter unfavorable features on others.

Following on from his classification of three types of delinquents, Professor Steinberg emphasizes three aspects of parenting: vigilance, permissiveness, and disruption of the parent-child relationship. He makes a series of recommendations to increase vigilance, decrease permissiveness, and minimize disruption.

Professor Steinberg's Proposals

In order to increase the extent to which children's behavior is monitored, Professor Steinberg recommends an extension in the number of hours spent at school. This is an interesting idea, but probably not practical. More feasible, in order to increase vigilance, parents can set up a defined schedule of activities (such as homework or household chores) for a child to follow after he or she gets home from school, or they can require telephone contact during the afternoon. Another possible way of increasing parental monitoring would be through the use of electronic devices such as pagers (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984).

In order to decrease parental permissiveness and encourage authoritative (firm but kindly) parenting, Professor Steinberg recommends parent training—in high school before parenthood, of new parents, of parents of preteenagers, or of parents of problem children. He is probably right that parents are likely to be keenest and most receptive to training in the months immediately following the birth of their first child. High school students may see little relevance in parent training and hence may lack motivation, while training directed at parents of teenagers may be ineffective because both the parents and the children have become too set in their ways. **The years between a child's birth and age 10 may be the most useful for parent training.**

In order to counter the effects of disruption in parent-child relationships, Professor Steinberg recommends early identification of children who are likely to suffer such disruption and hence become chronic offenders. In extreme cases, he argues that the child should be removed from the home environment, placed in foster care, and given a broad-based program of therapeutic intervention during the preadolescent years. He believes that the best methods of preventing disruption would be to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies and to provide special services for parents of high-risk children (e.g., children with low birth weight). He also points to the fact that day care during the first year of life may have negative effects, whereas later day care—at ages 3 and 4—has been shown to have long-term delinquency-reducing effects in Head Start experiments (Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, and Weikart, 1984).

Of these proposals, I am particularly attracted to Professor Steinberg's ideas about parent training in view of the evidence linking parenting and delinquency. However, in discussing parent training, I felt that he gave too much emphasis to authoritative control by parents and tended to neglect the importance of negotiation between parents and children. Parent training should not be targeted only on *early adolescent* delinquents or on parental permissiveness, as may perhaps be implied by his paper. Rather, its aim should be to increase consistency in parental treatment, to make parental rewards and punishments contingent upon desired or undesired child behavior, and to encourage parents to monitor child behavior carefully. Physical punishment of children should be discouraged; the main sanction used in parent training is to isolate the child for five minutes or so by sending him or her to a boring room.

The best known system of parent training has been developed by Patterson (1982). He emphasizes four key family management practices. The first is the setting of consistent house rules to spell out what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior and to schedule time and effort among family members. The second is parental monitoring of the child's behavior and whereabouts. The third is the use of consistent and contingent rewards and punishments to encourage prosocial and discourage antisocial behavior. The fourth is the development of problem-solving methods; parents are trained to negotiate, with each other and with children, to state the problem in neutral terms, to specify desired changes, and to brainstorm alternative solutions. Explicit contracts may be drawn up between parents and children, specifying who will do what and with what consequences.

Research shows that parent training can decrease child problem behavior. Patterson, Cobb, and Ray (1973) used parent training with 13 Oregon families referred by the juvenile court and other agencies for aggressive antisocial behavior. They showed that observed aversive child behavior (noncompliance, shouting, teasing, attacking, whining, damaging property, etc.) decreased by nearly half after the treatment which took an average of 31 hours of therapist time. Patterson (1974) extended the study to 27 aggressive boys, with

similar results; and Arnold, Levine, and Patterson (1975) showed that the 55 siblings of these boys also decreased their aversive behavior after the treatment. In a later experiment, Patterson, Chamberlain, and Reid (1982) randomly assigned 19 aggressive children to parent training or to a control group who received a variety of other treatments, and again showed that parent training produced a significant decrease in observed aversive behavior.

Unfortunately, while reductions in child problem behavior have been demonstrated in research with small numbers of children and short follow-up periods, this is not true of reductions in delinquency. There appears to be no well-designed experiment including adequate numbers of children and an adequate follow-up period that investigates whether parent training decreases delinquency. In a rare published evaluation of the effect of Patterson's parent training technique on delinquent behavior, Moore, Chamberlain, and Mukai (1979) compared 15 aggressive children who had been the target of parent training with 13 others matched in age and family composition. Two children in each group subsequently appeared in the juvenile court, but these numbers are too small to draw any conclusions.

Possibly the most adequate experiment on the effect of parent training on delinquency was carried out by Alexander and Parsons (1973). Out of 86 delinquents referred by the Utah juvenile court, 46 were randomly assigned to receive parent training and 40 received other kinds of family therapy or no treatment at all. Those who received parent training had a significantly lower rate of re-referral to the juvenile court in a 6-18 month follow-up period (26 percent as opposed to 55 percent, the rate for the whole county being 51 percent). Furthermore, a later study by Klein, Alexander, and Parsons (1977) showed that the siblings of delinquents in the parent training group had a lower rate of referral to the juvenile court (after the intervention, presumably) than siblings of delinquents in other groups (20 percent as opposed to 55 percent).

There are a number of problems of implementation of parent training experiments. A key issue is whether parent training can be used successfully with one-parent, non-white, or inner city families (e.g., Webster-Stratton, 1985). The families trained by Alexander and

Patterson were predominantly white, two-parent, and middle class. Another key problem is how to secure the continued participation of the most vulnerable families, especially those characterized by poverty and parental disharmony. These kinds of problems, and strategies to overcome them, have been reviewed by Fraser, Hawkins, and Howard (1986).

It seems too optimistic of Professor Steinberg to say that we have a wealth of evidence that effective parenting can be taught. Experiments on parent training justify cautious optimism that this might prove to be an effective technique for reducing delinquency, but larger-scale, longer-term experiments are both warranted and urgently needed.

Conclusions

Professor Steinberg is right to conclude that we have been as neglectful towards parents as neglectful parents are towards their own children. **I agree with his suggestion that efforts should be made to teach parents effective methods of bringing up children. However, I also think that widespread social programs of this kind should be preceded by careful, well-designed, experimental research designed to estimate their likely effects.**

Professor Steinberg did not discuss the possible role of the juvenile court in parent training. Juvenile courts in California, Utah, and Oregon made important contributions to the parent training experiments by Binder, Alexander, and Patterson by referring juveniles and their families for treatment. Perhaps more juvenile court judges, on an experimental basis, should order juveniles and their parents to undergo this type of treatment. An advantage of this is that the families would be coerced to attend the training sessions, so that problems of non-cooperation or attrition might be lessened. This type of treatment would probably be most appropriate for younger juveniles aged about 10-12. As already noted, juveniles who offend at an early age are a particularly high-risk group, so that parent training at this age could cause a large overall reduction in the crime rate if it was effective.

We know a great deal about how parenting-practices foster delinquency, but far less about how they can be changed to reduce it. At the present state of knowledge,

we cannot confidently promise that parent training will prevent delinquency. However, the possibilities of parent training clearly justify an expansion of its use, coupled with careful evaluation of its effects. The juvenile court could play an important role in this expansion.

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From Behavioral Science to Social Policy:

Look Before You Leap

Arden E. Melzer

The legacy of logical positivism to behavioral and social science is the persevering belief that there are laws governing the operation of society that are as robust and credible as those of Newtonian mechanics.

In this deterministic scheme of things, logically-constructed empirical research reveals the actual nature of the physical and social universe. Thus, a statistical description of a collective social behavior is treated as though it applies to all of the individuals who are members of that collective. The fallacy is obvious when one realizes that the proportion of all teenage pregnancies cannot be assigned to individual teenagers. (No teenager is ever just a little bit pregnant.)

A less obvious example of the application of faulty logic follows. If after-the-fact research reveals that *preadolescent* onset delinquents, as a group, "have, from an early age, identifiable problems in the area of aggression, impulsivity, social skills, and self-regulation" and are found to be "troublesome and intellectually slow during early elementary school, daring and dishonest during late elementary school, delinquent during junior high school, and criminals as young adults" as Steinberg suggests, then surely a massive screening program in the early elementary years would serve to identify *predelinquents* and lead us to some appropriate *intervention* or *treatment.*

Depending on the theory of causation in vogue, a social policy could then be prescribed to effect suitable remedies for the perceived problem. The conclusions of selected empirical studies could be found and offered as evidence for the validity of a favored theory or orientation. All that would be needed would be a constituency for the appropriate social legislation, sufficient funding, and a solution to the problem would follow. As is well known, the legislation which established the Office of Economic Opportunity resulted in the abolition of poverty in the United States and substantially reduced

delinquency. As that erudite observer, Groucho Marx, once said, "If you believe that one, I'll tell you another."

If, as Steinberg argues, the findings of such an *exact* science as developmental psychology reveal that inept, ignorant, neglected, and abused parents are the most significant proximate cause of juvenile delinquency, then parents are the appropriate object of intervention. The role of parents in the etiology of delinquency is discovered after the fact; that is, first comes the delinquent population, then comes the *scientific* characterization of the parents of delinquents. Then it is argued that the relationship of inept, permissive, ignorant, neglected, and abused parents to the delinquent acts of their children is actually a causal relationship because the relationship of parents with such characteristics and their delinquent children is regularly observed by researchers. This is much like the relationship of *sunspot* activity to economic phenomena. Few investment houses retain astronomers for the purpose of making predictions of the economy.

If the logic of Steinberg's argument is nevertheless accepted, then parents of delinquents should be compelled, by persuasive educators or an activist judiciary, to be trained to be better parents. The mutability of parental behavior must be assumed and the method of intervention must be demonstrably better than other known methods. In the meantime, while all of the future parents, inept parents, permissive parents, ignorant parents, neglected parents, and abused parents are benefiting from some program of intervention, something must be done with all of those pre-delinquent children: the school year could be extended so that they could be kept from the street.

The logic of the preceding burlesque of social problem-solving is not substantially different from the logic of Steinberg's analysis of the causes of, and cures for, juvenile delinquency. His argument, however, is sophisticated and rhetorically appealing.

His assertion that "we know **EXACTLY** (emphasis added) what types of families produce delinquents, we know what it is that they do that produces delinquents, and we know why these patterns have the effects that they do" is remarkable in its complete absence of qualification. It is certainly an arguable assertion.

If what Steinberg states is *true*, then we need no

longer worry that *delinquency* may not reside in the individual who is adjudicated delinquent (or his unadjudicated but apparently offending peer) or may, like beauty, be in the eye of the (certified) beholder.

We need no longer trouble ourselves about the question of why similar behaviors in dissimilar children elicit different evaluations from the gatekeepers of the organizations that selectively detect, apprehend, adjudicate, and dispose of juveniles.

We may ignore the fact that not all children of the same parents become delinquent.

There is no need to be troubled by purely legal definitions of delinquency such as status offenses.

Research on delinquency is a many-splendored thing: there are questions of statistical reliability; there are questions of external validity, namely, how *generalizable* the findings of a given study are; there are questions of construct validity; and there is the major question of whether one is ever justified in basing causal arguments on non-experimental studies.

The legitimizing of a point of view with a great variety of studies done with varying populations at varying times and employing various research strategies constitutes a type of verbal *meta-analysis*—a view from the mountain. Such a view may appear to yield a consistent image, but appearances can be deceiving.

For there to be a science of childhood and adolescence—a science of development that views development as a sequence of stages—it is necessary to create the *reality* of such stages. In other words, the concept of *childhood* must be created. That childhood, as we know it, does not present itself to us without such a concept is readily seen in historical perspective and through cultural comparisons.

From the middle ages to today, lifespan has generally increased. Those whom we would today call *children*, in times past assumed *adult* occupations. Their behaviors were not those prescribed for today's child.

Relying on Phillippe Aries' *Centuries of Childhood*, LaMar Empey recounts that in the 18th century "boys as young as five years old wore swords and not just as ornaments. The schools...were marked by so many duels, mutinies, brawls, and beatings of teachers that regulations were eventually written forbidding pupils to keep firearms, swords, or clubs in their rooms or to bring

them to class." Public school boys, said Montaigne, "practiced more vices by the age of 16 than anyone else would have by 60." A hundred of them had caught the pox before they read their first lesson in Aristotle and they read Aristotle young! Empey goes on to document the recency of concern with drug use (abuse?). Concern with drug use is not the same thing as the incidence and prevalence of use. Empey states that "it was not until the 19th century that much of the behavior that had been entirely acceptable in the Middle Ages and only partly lamented in the 17th and 18th centuries became cause for great alarm" (1982).

In the United States, not long after the Civil War, the International Alliance of Workers favored the involvement of children in *social production* and asserted that every person over the age of nine years should be a productive worker.

Empey asks the essential question: **has the behavior of young people grown worse over the centuries or have significant changes occurred in the way in which we react to it and define it?** Empey is persuaded it is the latter. One could argue that, over the centuries, as Western civilization has separated children from that of the general population, the behavior of children has become more controllable. The current concerns may have more to do with the general growth of population and the sheer magnitude of frightening behaviors than with the worsening of behaviors.

The evolution of the concept of *childhood* was a necessary precursor of the concept of *juvenile delinquency*, and that evolution proceeded to the turn of the 20th century in the United States. The relatively recent history of Western civilization reveals that society responded to criminal behavior without age bias.

All of this is well known—especially to those whose occupations are supported by juvenile justice organizations and the many other organizations that interact with them. Although it is common knowledge, this knowledge appears to be masked by the perception that things are worse than ever and that there is little hope for the future.

Is it possible that the zeal which accompanied reformist efforts in the creation of modern childhood also prevented reformers from grasping the unintended consequences of such reform? The business of doing good for children, or widows and orphans, blossomed into one of

the largest service industries of modern times, providing an all but unique opportunity for combining altruism with occupational status. **The urge to ameliorate is the twin sister of the need to control. The basic instrument of social control in modern society is bureaucratic rationalization.** As the special values of childhood were reflected in economic and social legislation—labor laws, compulsory education laws, social security laws—and in the creation of special organizations for children, most notably the juvenile court, the new social imperatives were expressed in administrative structures. These structures operate in much the same way as highways: as more lanes are added (to handle the volume of traffic), more drivers take to the highway. Eventually, when this strategy fails, other measures are urged such as increased use of public transportation and economic penalties such as increased taxes on gasoline (ostensibly for purposes of conservation or maintaining domestic industry).

Similarly, when the many different ways of doing good for an expanding juvenile clientele within the juvenile justice system are perceived as *ineffective,* the alternative proposal is to require other institutions—educational and familial—to be more *effective.*

I would argue, first, that juvenile delinquency does not reside wholly within the class of children so adjudicated. It is, at least in part, a function of the modern concept of childhood (and its historical antecedents). Second, I would argue that the parents of delinquents are not the sole authors of their children's acts. While law-offending children and adolescents and their families may be the actors to whom we attend, the authors may be found among the designers of social and economic policy, particularly among those who are committed to grand programs of social amelioration. Among such programs, one can easily identify the unanticipated consequences of public housing where the requirement to use low tax-yield land *efficiently* (i.e., more multiple units in the same land space) uprooted natural communities and increased population density and collateral law-offending acts; or the (now abandoned) practice of denying aid to dependent children if there were a man in the house, thereby putting families or family-like units under immense pressure and promoting the single-parent family often said to be associated with delinquent activity. The previous examples apply to poor people but

the emergence of the two-earner family among the *middle classes* is also a function of fiscal and monetary policies. Through the tax structure, income transfers are made in accordance with social policy. The disposable income of middle-class families has been profoundly affected by the policy of managing interest rates in accordance with particular economic theories. The literally absent (working) parent has often been cited as being implicated in delinquent behavior.

From a pragmatic point of view, Steinberg is not in total disagreement with the argument that parents of delinquents may not be the sole authors of their children's acts. He states, "we must look beyond the individual delinquent, beyond his or her family or peer group, and look, instead, at the broader context in which families and children develop in contemporary society."

Steinberg argues that since "psychotherapy, as it is conventionally practiced, has no apparent impact on the juvenile offender" and "family therapy, as it is usually practiced, is not effective in the treatment of delinquency," and residential treatment programs fail more often than not, and as incarceration and diversion programs are too costly, "some very dramatic transformations in some of society's most fundamental institutions" must be undertaken.

For Steinberg, society's institutions *evoke and exacerbate* the parental patterns that contribute, in one or another specified way, to delinquent activities. The family is, therefore, a crucial link between society and delinquent activity. In contrast to those theorists, like Albert K. Cohen for whom the "family is not the world," Steinberg sees the family as critical in being the proximate cause of general types of delinquency that are related to broadly-conceived developmental stages (i.e., the age bracket of the initial delinquent act). In order to divorce the concept of delinquency from adjudication, Steinberg cites the results of surveys which provide evidence that non-adjudicated children may, in general, engage in delinquent-like activities.

The question remains whether children and adolescents become involved in the juvenile justice process at random or whether there is a systematic difference between those who are adjudicated and those who are not adjudicated.

In any case, if delinquent acts are as widespread as Steinberg's (and others') respondents suggest, then for

many *delinquent* actors or those actors who deviate from formal legal proscriptions, the family is surely not the world. Moreover, it is not known whether this suspected widespread deviancy is greater than it ever was and whether that *fact* constitutes the social problem. The large *middle adolescent* group, suspected of widespread deviancy, is not of as much concern to Steinberg as *early adolescents* who "score lower on a standardized measure of psychosocial maturity" and "seem to be more peer oriented." Once again, the suggestion is that non-familial factors may be implicated in the deviant acts of the adolescent.

Of greatest concern to Steinberg is the *preadolescent* delinquent who evidences multiple problems. Of this group, Steinberg suggests that "we might think of them as *psychopathologically* delinquent." He notes that current thinking implicates genetic factors.

Having classified three groups of delinquents according to the age of onset of delinquent activities, Steinberg attempts to argue that "the developmental histories—particularly in the family—of each type of delinquent differ in some very important ways." It should be recalled that the *middle adolescent* delinquent is said to be no different from his non-adjudicated peer. In consequence, the developmental history (if that is the crucial compound variable) of the *middle adolescent* delinquent should be the same as the norm for all middle adolescents.

Therefore, the entire society needs to be *treated* in some way if middle adolescent behavior is a compelling social problem! Steinberg does not disavow this implication as he indeed proposes a grand preventive social intervention which is discussed later.

For the *early adolescent*, Steinberg sees *parental permissiveness* as critical although the *early adolescent* is *peer oriented.* It must follow then that, if the parent were not permissive, the *early adolescent* would not be peer oriented. Are only *early adolescent* delinquents *peer oriented* or is this *orientation* the norm for this age group? Perhaps, as has often been suggested, delinquent peer groups (gangs?) are not the same as other peer groups. It follows from Steinberg's beliefs, which are not predicated at this point on *exact* knowledge but on more interesting speculative and analytical thinking, that some intervention with parents is indicated.

For the most serious *preadolescent* onset delinquent,

Steinberg states that "after biological factors, parental rejection—that is, disruption in the parent-child relationship in its most severe form—is the single best predictor of the development of psychopathology among children of all cultures." It should be recalled that Steinberg views delinquency in this age group as *psychopathological.*

It is not clear whether age of onset is the most discriminating way to classify juvenile delinquents. For example, a child who enters the justice system at an early age is likely to be the recipient of special attention within the justice system and within the school system and with early *labelling* and attention may come to define himself as he is defined by others. He may become a *self-fulfilling prophecy* although it may be another's prophecy that is being fulfilled. Whether the foregoing proposition is empirically the case or not, that possibility has to be ruled out before one can begin to consider the notion that *preadolescent* delinquency is the result of psychopathology that is, in turn, caused by either genetic factors or parental rejection or both. Do most young children who experience severe rejection become delinquent? And what of the specific nature of delinquent acts? Is incorrigibility the same as murder in that they are both legally proscribed? Do *preadolescents* break the law in the same way as older delinquents? Are such questions irrelevant when one classifies by age of onset?

One of the great problems with Steinberg's scheme of things is that it is as mechanistic as Newton's laws. There are forces that act on the object—in this case, the child—and the object moves accordingly. It is a psychosocial law of inertia. As for society, it is part of an entropic universe; one that is presumably becoming disorganized. And that scheme of things is to be understood in terms of linear relationships. A child does not create his own future; the singular human capacity to reflect and to reflect on reflection is not essential to mechanistic developmental notions. As the individual child or adolescent is acted upon, the child has no choice but to respond in a way that is determined by the instigation. The delinquent is not, therefore, responsible for delinquent (or indeed any) acts. For this reason, Steinberg is disposed to propose massive structural interventions which affect virtually the entire society (guilty or not). It is to be presumed that every-

one will be better off if delinquency is controlled—regardless of the costs.

Abandoning his developmental argument, Steinberg proposes that the school should have custody of all children for an extended day for twelve months a year, and parenting skills should be taught to all high school students, to new parents, to parents of preteenagers, and to parents obviously in need of help. **Clearly, if developmental concepts are relevant to a proposed intervention, then the intervention should be differentiated according to developmental stages.** Custody for all and training in the vocation of parenting does not appear to be either a necessary or a sufficient consequence of his developmental orientation.

The second of Steinberg's two proposals, namely, a quantum leap in Parent Effectiveness Training (PET), is a type of vocational approach that may offer benefits to all of the prospective trainees REGARDLESS of the developmental premises of his argument. While this proposal may be presumed to be at least as worthwhile as membership in the Boy Scouts, **is there any reason to suppose that genetic deficiencies will be affected by a cognitive approach? Is there any reason to suppose that severe parental rejection, more often than not, can be tempered by information about good parenting and the sharing of *skills?* Are parental rejection and abuse merely the result of ignorance?**

What of the PET curriculum? Whose norms should inform the *curriculum*? Where do the effective trainers come from? What characteristics should they possess? Who will prepare the trainers? What social agendas would enter into the selection of trainers? Should this be an opportunity for the unemployed or low income groups? And how would this massive program be financed? Would it be less costly than incarceration for delinquents or formal diversion programs?

Perhaps it is unfair to ask such questions, but the problem with all seemingly good ideas lies not in their inspirational qualities but in their implementation. Such *details* cannot be left to administrative agencies without risking bureaucratic debasement.

Quite apart from consideration of large-scale implementation of PET programs and their presumed but untested superiority over the *conventional* therapeutic approaches, is there ANY reason to suppose that purely cognitive interventions with parents of delin-

quents will change the delinquency statistics?

The proposed massive educational intervention is based on the supposition that parents are the key to the delinquent behavior of their children. MacIver long ago pointed out that "while no doubt the example of the elders has an important influence on the young, this whole mode of explanation is seriously defective." MacIver then reviews the many different views of the etiology of delinquency including hereditary and purely environmental perspectives. He addresses the "principle that parents one way or another are responsible for the sins of their children," but finds that the role of parents in the etiology of delinquency does not offer a "logical explanation of our present problem, the over-all increase in the volume of delinquency," both here and abroad (MacIver, 1966).

Steinberg suggests that our knowledge has dramatically improved over the past quarter of a century; we now know more.

There can be little doubt that there is more information, including the conclusions of more social research, than a quarter of a century ago. One can nevertheless disagree that we know more in the sense that we can be more secure in the quality and predictive value of the knowledge that has been gained. Each generation's behavioral scientists evidence the accustomed optimism—for a while.

Turning to the *radical* approach proposed by Steinberg, namely, intensifying the custodial function of the public school, it appears that he would shift the burdens of the juvenile justice system to the educational system, except that ALL children would be in custody. Steinberg presumes that this custodial arrangement will also yield educational benefits. That is a curious presumption in the light of today's debate over what children are NOT learning in their classrooms.

Is it to be supposed that extending the quantity of time in school increases the quantity of learning? Without a plan for implementing an entirely new approach to engaging children in educational efforts, and without a notion of how to attract the teachers who would be capable of instigating such engagement, Steinberg's proposal should be recognized for what it is: a proposal for custody of all children in public school buildings all year. In our society, that may well be a prescription for col-

lateral delinquency on a scale never before contemplated. Steinberg recognizes that "it is not an idea whose time has come," and perhaps that is just as well.

Steinberg's developmental insights, then, lead to a rather general proposal for Parent Effectiveness Training for all or at least for as many as wish, or as many as can be persuaded or, perhaps, as many as juvenile court judges may have the authority to require. **Given his argument of the relation of developmental stages to the seriousness of delinquency, it is surprising that a more focused set of interventions is not proposed.**

Perhaps our society as a whole, and the juvenile justice system in particular, would benefit more from a thorough scrutiny of the IMPLEMENTATION of past grand ideas and past practices than from the excitement of a new all-purpose intervention of unknown (and probably not easily tested) worth.

It would be inappropriate to conclude this response without noting that it is always much easier to respond to someone else's creative and intellectually interesting proposals than to offer one's own. It is clear that Steinberg speaks with a strong voice. The well-being of young people is part of the well-being of the whole society. His ideas may serve to provoke a useful discussion on the relationship of our young people to the rest of society and the essential relation of individual liberty to the need for personal security. It may also serve to instigate a careful review of the ways in which social research and rhetoric are employed in the argument for social programs.

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